UNCLE JACK

ETC.

WALTER BESANT

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By WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN,' 'THE CAPTAINS' RO
'ALL IN A GARDEN FAIR,' 'DOROTHY FORSTER,' ETC.

London

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UNCLE JACK.

I.

THE MOST UNHAPPY GIRLS IN THE WORLD.

"I SUPPOSE, my dear," said Cicely, sometimes called Cis, which you must not pronounce Kiss — as the schoolgirls, poor things, are taught to pronounce their Latin—but like this: Siss—Siss—Siss—soft and pretty. "I suppose, my dear, that, although we are truly the most unhappy girls in all the world, that is no reason why we should make ourselves miserable?"

"Why, no," replied Christina, with a little hesitation, "we are certainly most horribly unhappy girls, but yet——it seems as if that is all the more reason why we should get what consolation we can."

"Of course it is," said Cicely. "And yet Harry was wondering, this morning, how I could possibly have the heart to play lawn tennis, our affairs being in so desperate a condition. Why, it is the only thing to prevent brooding over our misfortunes and going melancholy mad. As for himself, he went to play off his tie with so glum a face, that my heart bled for the poor boy. He said he knew he should lose it, through thinking about me."

At that moment the poor boy was sitting behind a cool claret-cup, in a tent, rejoicing in the laurels of the victor. Yet he, too, was a most unhappy young man, as you shall see immediately.

"As for Fred," replied Christina, "the dear boy's letters every day are so woe-begone that I have no heart for anything. He says that he can think about nothing at all but the dreadful turn of things, and that his gloomy chambers are ten times as gloomy as ever. Poor dear!"

No doubt, chambers in Brick Court *are* gloomy, and in July they smell like stale bakehouses. That cannot be avoided, and, therefore, the young man was perfectly justified in getting away from them. In fact, at this moment he was lying in the stern of a pair-oar, taking his turn to steer, and the boat was very near the Bells of Ouseley, where they proposed to halt for the night and to take

copious refreshment. But he was a very unhappy young man, because he was in love with a very dainty damsel, and he was crossed in love.

"Chris," said Cicely, with a deep, deep sigh, "I saw in a book of verses, the other day, a song about love being a pleasing pain and a teasing smart, and that Chloe—that is, you and I, my dear—we are two very nice Chloes, I am sure—now wishes away and then wishes back the honeyed dart. There was a picture in the book as well, showing a young man in a little wig, tied up behind with a black ribbon, and with white silk stockings, red shoes, and diamond buckles. He was lying on a bank, saying pretty things to a shepherdess in green. How nice Harry would look in a wig saying sweet things! Fred, of course, will wear one in a year or two, but only in Court, poor fellow! Yes, my dear, love *is* a pleasing pain, you know. Yet one would not like to be without the men—especially when other girls feel exactly the same way. But still, you know—they really are——"

"They are, Cis. They really are. And it quite destroys the pleasure of playing one's best and looking one's best, doesn't it?—to feel that the poor boys are taking no pleasure in their lives, but are always moping and miserable."

"Don't you find that ices do you good, Chris?"

"Strawberry ices. I don't think Neapolitans are so good in time of trouble."

They are two very pretty girls, and I am quite sure that they would, under any temptation, turn out to be as virtuous as they are pretty, and, therefore, in the end, as happy as they are pretty. At present the only temptation in their way was an unreasonable woman, about whom you will hear without much delay. This obstruction to their happiness caused them sometimes to stamp their little feet, clench their little hands, contract their brows, shake, nod, wag, and agitate their pretty heads, heave their bosoms, use strong, very strong, words, and, in church, feel that in the matter of forgiving one's enemies certain reservations must generally be allowed, for purposes of justice, without thinking of human weakness. Mrs. Branson, Miss Antoinette Baker, Mr. Valentine Vandeleur, and the Secretary, were, at present, these exceptions. At this moment the girls were on their way home from lawn tennis It was an evening in early July; the time was nine, and there was a warm delicious twilight, with most grateful perfumes of roses, mignonette, heliotrope, and all kinds of summer flowers. They were dressed alike, yet with a difference. Likeness with points of difference betokens friendship. For both wore lawn-tennis costumes, and they had been playing, and carried in their hands the implements or tools. One of them—Chris this was—wore a white flannel frock (ought one to call it a skirt?) with white spun-silk jersey, a white hat, with a very white feather; a bunch of yellow roses on her shoulder, and tan gloves. Cis, for her part, wore a

dress of grey nun's cloth, with a grey felt hat, and red feather, a bunch of red roses at her throat, and grey gloves—looking, however, very little like a nun, but much more like a young lady content to take her lot among the common changes and chances of this mortal life. And as for their faces, both were pretty; and for their figures, both were shapely; and for colour, one had dark brown hair—which was Chris—and one light—which was Cis. And for their eyes, one—which was Chris—had brown eyes, full of light and truth; and the other—which was Cis—had grey eyes, bright and quick; and the features of Christina Branson were larger than those of Cicely Thornton, but both had regular features, and—well, perhaps one of them had too full a mouth, and another too pronounced a chin; and are we not all mortals, and, therefore, imperfect? And was not each of them faultless in the eyes of her lover? And who am I, that I should pick out little specks and faults in the beauty of a very pretty girl?

"Our fate is too cruel," said Chris, with another deep sigh. "Fred says we must wait, if my stepmother continues obstinate, until he can make an income. That means till he is five-and-forty, and I am about the same age. Oh! Gracious! And he a Venerable judge by that time, no doubt."

"But mine is worse," said Cicely. "Because Harry will never be able to marry at all. That poor boy will certainly not succeed in making an income even for himself, unless he turns professional bowler: when I suppose I might set up a ginger-beer stall to help pay the rent. Does the—the Obstruction continue inflexible?"

"My dear, she grows daily more inflexible. Antoinette and Mr. Vandeleur between them have charmed away her old kindly heart: nothing remains."

"Do they show no signs of going away?"

"None whatever. They make the house the headquarters of the Cause. It is no longer a house; it is an Office. Antoinette has introduced women's dress of the future into daily use, and my poor unfortunate stepmother is going to adopt—at her age, dear! Oh!—the divided skirt and a jacket. As for Mr. Vandeleur, he finds, he says, the Syrian costume less unlike Woman's Dress of the Future than any other, and so he has got one, and goes about in it, and calls it the Man's Costume of the Future."

"The Wretch!" Nothing more hearty could be imagined than this ejaculation.

"Yesterday, my stepmother told me she wanted to have a little talk—what she called a serious talk. I was reminded of my poor father's express wish, that I should continue in obedience. That is an old story, and I can retaliate, if I like, by saying that my father never thought that his widow would take up such a horrible line. Then she said that she had her plans both for Harry and myself. That, as regards me, the Cause requires my services and my money; that it will be necessary, absolutely necessary, for me to marry some

one attached to the Cause—Mr. Vandeleur, in fact, if he is good enough to offer. And, finally, that her mind was made up, and there was nothing more to be said."

"And you?"

"I lost my temper, and told her that if that was the case, my mind was made up too; but she need not expect any of the money to help the Cause, for I would continue single all my life, rather than let her have it."

"Poor Fred!" said Cicely. "But it was spirited, my dear. Heigho! Don't you think, Chris, it would be extremely nice if a rich uncle would turn up, as they do in story-books? Oh! with what joy would we welcome home an uncle from India with thousands of lakhs of rupees!"

"My dear, you can't have thousands of lakhs, because a lakh is a hundred thousand rupees, which is——"

"At the present rate of exchange, my father says, ruefully, because most of his money is out there, the rupee is only eighteenpence. But my meaning is clear, and I feel—yes, I really do—a boundless power of loving such an uncle; the more rupees he had, the more I should love him. Do you think Harry would be jealous? Oh! the dear man! I would jump into his arms. How very, very good it is of parents to scrape and screw for their children! How beautifully those who do not illustrate the necessity for the Fifth Commandment, which becomes, Chris, very difficult of application when such a Will has been made as——"

"But—Cis—really—the Fifth Commandment never even mentions a stepmother."

"Dear me!" Cicely replied. "That is so true. To think that I should have forgotten it! And what a blessing, what a heavenly blessing, it must be for you to remember that!"

They were walking along a road which lay between fields, orchards, gardens, and pretty villas; and was outside a little country town. It was so near the town that there were a good many people walking along the road; it was so much in the country that a few of them wore smock-frocks, and there was an agreeable sense of hay in the air, and sometimes there passed along the road one or more of those happy persons who love the smell of hay so much that they weep and sneeze continually all the summer, and the tears of joy run without ceasing down their cheeks; it was so much in the country that you would see farmhouses standing off the road, and so near the town that every few yards or so you came upon a pretty villa among its own gardens and trees. The evening was quiet, and when there were no carts on the road you could hear the distant tinkle of a sheep-bell, or the cry of a bird, and, if anything was wanting to complete the rural feeling, there were moments when, unless the senses were greatly deceived, pigs and a pigsty seemed readily accessible to their admirers.

The most characteristic distinction about English country towns

is the invariable collection of residences—Villas, Lodges, Cottages, and what not—which stand outside them all, with their pretty and well-ordered gardens. They are the houses of the people who have made money, or have inherited it, or have worked out their time for their pensions and retiring allowances.

Everybody knows these towns, of which there are hundreds in this fair realm, and it is in one of them that the surprising events of this story took place. If there were time, I would show you all the Society of the place: first, the people who know the county people: then the people who do not, but yet are highly respectable people—Indians and Service people: then the professional people, active and retired, also tolerably respectable, but a long way below the county circles: mixed up with all the unmarried ladies of all ages: then the retired tradesmen; add to these the young men who go away and come back once or twice in the year, that is to say, very nearly all the young men worth considering, for a country town can hardly be said to offer a career; there is, however, a scanty remnant who, by reason of being gifted with money, or stupidity, or unconquerable laziness, or a sweet and placid contentment, or that great unfathomable British Thirstiness which entirely prevents any other business, do remain in their native place and "hang around." These, however, are few, and they are not generally happy, and very often fall into the mischief still for idle hands to do. There are a few other young men: those who are articled to the law: those who have begun practice on their own account as curates and doctors: as for talk and excitement, why, every little town in England, if you come to consider, is a little world in itself, grows in its own plantation a never-ceasing crop of news, gossip, scandal, stories, whispers, reports, and secrets, quite enough for home consumption, and is, therefore, sufficient unto itself, and though some of the men, conceding somewhat to the times, take in a London morning paper, there is quite enough interest for everybody (without any help from foreign telegrams) in watching the rise, prosperity, and decline of families, the comedies and tragedies of the common daily life, and the things which make the little world of a country town and its suburbs at once noble and mean, glorious and sordid, gentle and simple, sad, glad, sorry, mirthful, stupid, and wise.

The young ladies of these towns, for their part, have not yet begun to go away, though no doubt the time will soon arrive when they, too, will ask each other why they should be any longer mewed up like canaries in a cage, not trusted to go about by themselves, kept in compulsory idleness, and forbidden to leave the place where they were born, even although there are no young men at all to fall in love with them. "Why," they will ask, "should we go on wasting the freshness of our May?" Then they will form a Grand National Nuptial Association, which shall undertake to provide a continual supply of lovely damsels (from the congested districts)

for those places, wherever they may be, in which there are pining (and eligible) shepherds, so that from whatever quarter of the habitable globe a sigh shall be wafted by telephone from a languishing nymph, tired of her calm, monotonous, native duckpond, there shall be flashed across the stormy ocean in return a telegraphic invitation to come out and receive the blessing of love, even though there be attached the condition of taking a part in the struggle and a share of the burden, so that the play of Adam and Eve, the couple who would have been no less solitary had there been a thousand other Adams and Eves, shall be enacted again and again all over the world, the one man and the one maid, each for each, with a great deal of make-believe sympathy (among the better sort) for other couples. This will be a truly admirable Society, at once charitable, political and social-economical, benevolent, prudent, peace-making, harmonious, and religious. And moreover, it will meet with the most magnificent patronage, with, I make no doubt, the Royal Family, the two Archbishops, and the Ladies' Land League to support it.

The "needs" of this town—I designedly use the parochial and pulpit word, because the business is of such importance, and brooks of no delay—were very great, even crying. Bath, I am told, is extraordinarily congested, and at Hastings the cry is said to be most mournful for a tender-hearted man to hear; but at this town it was estimated, by a distinguished member of the Statistical Society, that there was a proportion of thirty-three and one-third girls to one man. As they only counted young ladies, and not "young persons"—that is, shop-girls, work-girls, servant-girls, and so forth, who have no business to have either hearts, ambitions, or passions—I do not quite know how they arrived at the fraction. As a matter of fact, there were certainly not more than thirty young ladies, all reckoned, and only one young man. Even the two curates were both married. The one eligible young man left in the place was Harry Branson, and he was already in love with, and engaged to, Cicely Thornton, who, with Chris, Christie, or Christina Branson, helped to make up the thirty young ladies of the place. It must be owned that the thirty did all they could to create a social life, just as if there had been thirty young men as well. They were *exigéantes;* they would have nothing short of universal surrender of everything to themselves. For their sakes lawns were enlarged and cut up into tennis courts; for them existed the choral society; for them the flowers blossomed, the strawberries ripened, the peaches grew, the sun shone; for them bands and musicians were hired, parties were given, afternoon teas were held; concerts, entertainments, and musical services were performed. It was on their account (because they never gave any money to anything) that lecturers, deputations, charity-sermon preachers, and "organizers" kept away from the place, together with organ-grinders, German bands, Punch and Judy (the fun of which no young lady has ever been able to

appreciate), circus-pitchers, and so forth, who were never tempted by a single copper to venture near this suburb. On the other hand, gipsies came often, and crossed many a pretty palm; and if soothsayers, seers, spiritualists, prophets, and astrologers do not go there, it is because they have not yet found out the burning curiosity of the British *demoiselle* to know her future. By the united efforts of the thirty girls, too, professors of foreign languages, music, singing, painting, drawing, and other arts, were enabled to make a humble, but sufficient, living in the town. For their amusement and recreation Messrs. Mudie and Smith sent down whole waggon-loads of books, every one in three volumes, and every one published at so costly a price that it must certainly be a miracle of literature, and every one especially written for these young ladies by novelists who ask (and very often get) no other payment for their work than the smiles of bright eyes and the approval of pretty faces. They have also, however, another and a deeper design. It is this. By portraying a fuller and more joyous life than is attainable by modern English girls, they encourage the spirit of discontent which, when duly fostered, trained, and led, works marvels; insomuch that many of the girls in country towns have begun to ask whether the ocean of life is, after all, only rather a pretty duckpond sheltered by trees, and whether there is really nothing else but a church on Sunday, a little music, a little society, a little anxiety about dress, a little make-believe at study, and a little reading of novels. It is not much, is it? And it must make those who enjoy this life ask each other sometimes, how about the curse of labour, and if there is no other experience in the soul's pilgrimage, such as those described in the dear, delightful, wicked story-books, attainable by her who greatly dares.

All these things, with ample sufficiency, and even daintiness, of diet, and for the most part liberality in dress allowance, were given to these girls, and yet—yet—they were not happy. Twenty-eight of them murmured because they had no lovers. The remaining two—strange inconsistency!—because they had. Merely to have a lover satisfies one for the moment only. If the actual lover of the present ceases to be the prospective husband of the future, what sort of a lover is he then? What good is he? As well—even better—have none at all. Such was the hard and lamentable case both of Cicely Thornton and Christina Branson.

As the two girls walked along the twilight road under the fragrant blossoms and the pendent caterpillars of the limes, they observed, standing at a corner where two ways meet, a gentleman who was looking up the road and down the road, as if in uncertainty. He was a man of good height, a handsome man, with a great brown beard, which was all they observed in the twilight. When the girls passed he raised his hat, and asked courteously if they could direct him to Mr. Branson's house.

"It is thirty years," he explained, "since I was here last, and there have been so many changes in the road that I seem to have forgotten my way to the old place."

"I live there," said Chris. "But—Mr. Branson? You do not know, then—it is five years since my father died."

"Your father died? Your father? Sam dead? Sam married? And you—can you be his daughter? Sam with a grown-up daughter—Sam dead?" He repeated these words, gazing at the girl, as if in thirty years such things as marriage, death, birth, and growing-up were out of the common experience.

"I am Mr. Branson's daughter certainly," said Chris quietly.

"Why, I am his brother—your uncle, young lady."

"Oh, good gracious!" cried Cicely. "It is—it is the UNCLE!" The girls caught each other's hands and gasped. This really was a most extraordinary coincidence.

"And what is your name?" asked the stranger.

"Christina. You are my uncle?"

"Christina," he repeated; "you are named after your grandmother. Yes. I am most certainly your uncle. And this young lady—is she also my niece?"

"She will be, I hope, when she marries my brother—my only brother Harry."

"Your only brother, Harry—I see. There are, then, two of you. Will you shake hands with me, Niece Christina? I am your Uncle John, formerly known in these parts as Jack Branson. But I suppose no one remembers me now." He said this dubiously, as if expecting to be well remembered.

"But—oh! it can't be—you have been dead a long time," cried Chris, hesitating. "Oh! a long time. I remember now. Papa spoke of you sometimes when we were little. After his death we have never thought of you at all, except as a dead man."

"Perhaps he is a ghost," said Cicely heartlessly. "Pinch him, my dear."

"No—no—not a ghost, at any rate," and the stranger laughed; he had a full voice, pleasant to hear. "Not a ghost. If you thought me dead, it was because I wrote to no one. Shake hands, Niece Christina."

She gave him her hand.

"It is thirty years, Christina," he said, holding her hand tightly, "since I have shaken hands with kith or kin."

"My poor Uncle John! Call me Chris," she said. "Everybody does."

"Call me Uncle Jack, Chris. I don't know the name of John," he replied.

"Come home with me," she said.

They walked along in silence, stealing glances at each other, while Cicely murmured low, "Oh! it is wonderful; oh, who ever heard

of such a thing? Oh, what a good uncle to come home at such a juncture!"

"There is the old house," cried Uncle Jack suddenly. He stopped at the garden gate and looked at the place. "You have altered it very little," he said. "It is the same place as of old. Only the trees have grown bigger; and my father is gone and—I suppose—everyone who can remember me. I might have looked for it. Somehow, when one is away for thirty years, one thinks that at home everything remains the same."

"Oh," cried Cicely, "do you, pray, call a niece, and such a niece as Chris, nobody? Tell me"—this irrepressible young person laid eager hands upon his arm—"tell me—we were just longing for an uncle—a Nabob—to drop from the clouds; have you got sacks full of rupees? Is there a Begum? And are you a right-minded, strong, courageous, and sympathetic uncle?"

"Why, my child?"

"Because—oh! because you are so awfully wanted; because we shall ask you for most of the courage you have got; because there is such a lot of work before you; because there are dreadful Obstructions in the way. Chris will tell you all—yes—all the dreadful, horrid, shameful story. If you do not feel for us, you had better go away again at once to Nabobland; for we are the most ill-used, unhappy girls in all the world." She spoke quickly, and her voice trembled a little. "Oh! Chris, Chris! I knew this morning that something was going to happen; but, of course, I couldn't tell what. First I met one jackdaw; then two; and then three. Three jackdaws always mean an unexpected uncle from India and Australia. Take him in, Chris dear: oh, I think he looks the very uncle we wanted: make much of him: and oh! don't—don't, pray—let Obstructions warp his manly mind!"

II.

THE APPLE OF DISCORD.

I AM quite certain that before the introduction of the Apple of Discord—"of course," said the Major, "it was thrown by a woman"—there was no place in the world more harmonious, more perfectly agreed upon all subjects, than this suburb of a country town. The harmony was like that of the spheres: it could be distinctly felt; it was in the air; it could even be heard, like the faint whispers of an Æolian harp, by those who had youth, sharp ears, and imagination. It imparted music to the rustling of the leaves, so that you got plenty of it, because the place was nothing in the world but a bower or coppice of trees, chiefly fruit trees, such as cherry, plum, apple, and pear (one always says apple and pear, like Army and Navy, Church and State, man and wife, bread and butter—the

order of which can never be reversed), mulberry, medlar, Siberian crab, peach, apricot, and nectarine, with many others which it would take too long to narrate, because the residents were agreed together in this as in all other matters, that plenty of fruit was a desirable thing; therefore, they barely tolerated such trees as were only useful for shade and beauty, as the oak, the elm, the ash, and the sycamore; yet they permitted the limes to grow in all the roads for shade in the summer, and the furnishing of the little birds with caterpillars; also they permitted Virginia creeper, honeysuckle, passion-flowers, jessamine, clematis, and Wisteria, in those places where they could not raise wall-fruit. Further, they rejoiced in roses, and vied with each other, yet ever mindful of the Tenth Commandment, in the production of beautiful and rare varieties. Nothing more tends to promote good feeling of one to another than the love of gardening, and when these honest people sallied forth in a morning (I mean in the good old harmonious days), the men in straw hats and jackets, and the ladies with garden hats, gloves, scissors, and watering-pots with long spouts, they looked over garden walls, peered between railings, poked sympathetic heads into open doors, and felt for each other so strong and perfect a friendship, that all the people living in houses next door fell in love with their neighbours—girls and boys with boys and girls, and aged spinster with retired colonel—quite regardless of the fact that in the cruel outer world scandalous things are often said, gossip handed round, young men too often rivals, young ladies whispered to be jealous of each others' charms. Consider what a world would that be in which every damsel is constantly engaged, not, if you please, in prinking and pranking before a mirror, but in lauding, magnifying, and glorifying the beauty, sweetness, constancy, wisdom, good housewifery, sensible headery, needle and threadery, taste, refinement, and other Christian virtues of her contemporaries! It is too much for the imagination. As with the vastness of the heavens, the impudence of our enemies, and the stupidity of those who think otherwise (I have long been surprised that the word "otherwise" has not long since become a synonym for "stupid"), the thing passeth all understanding. Yes; in this happy village, colony, or settlement, you might study the actual existence of a community actuated by the spirit of pure charity and benevolence one to the other. It was to be expected, therefore, that the ringing of the church bells would be so melodious as to soften the heart of a tramp, that the ripple of the trout stream would be like unto the distant laughter of girls; that the singing of the birds would be sweeter, and the humming of the bees more soothing, than anywhere else, and the evening air would be laden with the dropping of gentle music from every house, the voices of those who sung madrigals, glees, and roundelays. Nay, some went further, and insisted that nowhere else could the night policeman's ears be touched with so delicate, restful, and peaceful a snoring from behind white blinds

as in this village, the name of which some enthusiastic brothers proposed to call "Brotherly-Love-Continue," after seventeenth-century fashion, and in place of the name rendered historically famous ever since the great Queen Elizabeth once lay for a night in the town, and ordered, in memory of a visit, that whenever another monarch should pass that way he should hammer a nail in the Town Hall door. In religion, this happy village was Moderately High: that is to say, they loved a musical service which was also short, but they could not approve of a clergyman's assuming authority, because a village of Brotherly-Love-Continue must be, as regards authority, communistic. In politics they joined heartily in hating all Radicals, because a Brotherly-Love village must consist entirely of those natural enemies of Radicalism—the people who have no work to do, and are content to live upon other people's work. As to their views of rank, and so forth, they aspired not so much to intimacy with the Great as to a circle where all should occupy the same level, which must be high, if you please, and bracing, but not dizzy. Retired generals, colonels, Indian people, and such, they welcomed. The arrival of a man with a title—even if only a knight—would have made them for a time a little uneasy until they got used to him: and they held retail trade in the contempt which it undoubtedly deserves at the hands of those who are not engaged in it. In a word, they were a little circle of friends who occupied the little aristocratic suburb of an English town, lived with and for each other, shared the same simple tastes, were neither poor nor rich, clever nor stupid, æsthetic nor vulgar, aimed at no distinction, and were quite satisfied that in this world all is for the best, except that the services of half-pay officers are inadequately rewarded. Those who have got a sufficient income without work, duties, or responsibilities, and are English by birth, and "enjoy" no diseases to speak of, would be foolish indeed to think otherwise. It is for the lean and the hungry to find fault, for the hard workers to cry out, and for those whom the shoe pinches to try if things cannot be made easier.

In this colony of contented and virtuous Christians there were two families with whom we are especially concerned—though I am far from asserting that they were the most virtuous or the most remarkable: and I beg that I may not be charged with favouritism in selecting these two out of the twenty or thirty in the place. I would willingly write the story of all the rest, if they have any to tell. They were the Houses of Branson and Thornton. They lived in villas, side by side; they were united by the closest bonds of friendship, and already (before the Apple fell in their midst) looking forward to closer ties still. For, by a happy accident, Cicely Thornton and Chris Branson were of the same age, which is not an uncommon circumstance—there are many people, I am assured, of the same age as myself, though not, alas! so many as there used to be; they were both young—it hath happened to most of us to be

young, and to have youthful friends; they were, further, both eminently desirable from the point of view taken by young men, being as lovely as a summer day in June, and as sweet-tempered as perfectly happy damsels ought to be. Bad temper generally has some foundation or reason for it: there should be no smoke without fire. Not only were there two young ladies, but also two young men, their brothers. If the girls were now nineteen, the brothers were two-and-twenty, the ideal age for a lover, the time when all things, and therefore young women, are still seen under the illusions which it is so great a pity to lose, that some few among us keep them still; when a young man has still the comeliness of youth as well as of manhood; when all has yet to be done, and the world seems, to young Alexander and hot-headed Picrochole, worth the conquering, and the delights of life are boundless and unexplored. If one would wish to be always young, one should choose the age of twenty-two; if to be in the full strength of manhood, then one would be always thirty-five; unless one is a statesman, when seventy-five seems preferable for a permanency.

These young men were now two-and-twenty. They had been at school together, and together they went to Cambridge, where Harry Branson went in for athletics, and Fred Thornton for reading. Harry won the mile race for his University, and covered himself all over with glory, so that Cicely clasped Christina by the hand, and felt as if Heaven had indeed destined her (through her lover) to greatness. He was, also, admirable at football, cricket, racquets, tennis, especially the modern branch of the game, played with girls upon the grass, billiards—and, in fact, at all games requiring dexterity of hand and quickness of eye. To say, further, that he could dance admirably, that he was a good-looking lad, with a pleasing smile and charming manners, is also necessary in order to disarm prejudice; for it must be confessed that he did nothing, and wanted to do nothing, and preferred to do nothing.

The other young man, who took to reading, read to such good purpose that he went out in the first class of the Classical Tripos, and was immediately elected a Fellow of his College, whereupon Christina fell into Cicely's arms and wept tears of joy and triumph, for every woman likes her lover to distinguish himself, and though a high place in the Tripos is a small thing compared with a High Jump or a Long Race, yet it is always something. Fred betook himself to Lincoln's Inn, and I have very little doubt, because he expects it himself, that he will quickly become Lord Chancellor. In a better-managed society all these high offices will be filled by the very young men, who will enjoy the dignity with greater manifestations of pleasure, spend the income more nobly, and wear the robes much more gracefully. As they grow older they will be gradually reduced in rank. Thus, Archbishop at twenty-five; plain Bishop at twenty-eight; Suffragan, or even Colonial, Bishop at thirty; Archdeacon or Dean at six-and-thirty; Country Vicar or Head Master at forty,

and at sixty Curate or Assistant-Master. In this way the affairs of Church and State will get carried on with admirable spirit and courage, and we shall enjoy very remarkable changes. Fred Thornton would make an excellent Lord Chancellor at two or three and twenty, though perhaps at seventy he will be no wiser, and much worse tempered.

It was asked, I think by Epictetus, whether a man who makes a foolish will is thereby proved to be a Fool Absolute or only a Fool Partial. Some men have been great lawyers, great bishops, great statesmen, even respectable novelists, and yet have thus betrayed in the end the Fool-ishness which really belonged to them, so that it is a question whether such an one is to be written down Fool first and Great Man second, or Great Man first and Fool second. Certainly Mr. Samuel Branson, deceased, should have been written a Fool Absolute, because no one but a Fool Absolute could have left his property in so ridiculous a manner. It was a good property, consisting of an estate with houses, shares and moneys in stocks, as a gentleman's property ought to be. He devised it, therefore, to his children, subject first to a charge upon the estate during the lifetime of his widow, their stepmother, for her maintenance, and, next, to these conditions: his son was to be allowed four hundred pounds a year only until he married, when, if he married with his stepmother's consent, he would succeed to his inheritance, and if against this consent, the property should all go to his daughter provided she had not married against her stepmother's consent; and as regards his daughter aforesaid, she was to have two hundred pounds a year until she married, when she would succeed to her portion of fifteen thousand pounds, provided that she married with her stepmother's consent, and if against that consent, her share was to go to her brother, with the same provision. And if both married without the consent of their stepmother, the whole was to go to her. This delightful will the testator justified by explaining that young people ought to marry early; that it is a very dangerous and difficult matter for young people to choose wisely; and that he placed the greatest reliance on the judgment and prudence of his wife. Nobody, to be sure, ever called Mr. Samuel Branson a wise man.

So far, it was a most delightful story which Chris told her uncle next morning walking beneath the limes.

"And oh, uncle," she said, "nobody could have had a kinder or a more delightful stepmother than we had at first. As for thwarting us, or making any objection, she encouraged us. She loved Cis as much as me: she let Fred come to the house as often as he pleased —which was every day, poor boy! And as for the Major, she consulted him upon everything."

This was all true. There did not exist a kinder heart than that of the second Mrs. Branson. Unfortunately there did not exist a more tenacious person, when once she had formed an opinion, or a woman of less judgment, and therefore less able to form one worth

having. When such a woman makes a bonfire of her old idols, and goes after strange gods and goddesses, it is unpleasant for her friends unless they go with her.

"It all began with a lecture," Christina wept. "A lecture: and only three months ago. Three months—and what a change!"

She went on to show how this happened, and how so harmless a thing as a lecture, delivered by a young lady, produced the most baleful results. A Lecture! The most potent instrument, as we have always been taught to believe, in civilization. Have we not advanced to our present pitch of universal wisdom chiefly by means of lectures? Knowledge is power; and the way to get knowledge and to be therefore powerful is to attend lectures. Who would not be powerful? So that when Miss Antoinette Baker came from London to lecture on the Present Position, the Capabilities, Past and Future, and the Rights of Woman, everybody felt that here was an opportunity such as seldom offers of acquiring knowledge in quite a new line. The Capabilities of Woman! Her Future! Heavens, what might be revealed!

During the excitement which prevailed immediately before the lecture the Major showed the cloven hoof which proclaimed him to be a Snake in the grass. The confusion of metaphors is not mine, but Mrs. Branson's. It is beyond my own poor powers. "Women," he said, "will go on occupying the position which they always have occupied, and always will. There's the combatant and the non-combatant branch. And you don't give a command to a man in the Commissariat."

The lecturer was invited by Mrs. Branson, who was the acknowledged leader of local Society, to dine with her before the lecture, and to be present at an "At Home" after it. She was none other than Miss Antoinette Baker, who is already well known in her own circle, and will soon be much more widely known. The Great Feminine Conspiracy, which has many ramifications, and shows itself now in an outcry for woman's suffrage, now in a clamour about woman's dress, now for women doctors, and now for women inspectors, has never made a recruit more likely to be useful to them than Antoinette Baker. She has passed the examinations of the University of London in Honours both in Arts and in Science; she has for years spoken in a Debating Society, where she has acquired the art of disputing without losing her temper, or her head, or her tongue. She has written to the thoughtful magazines papers of the kind which are now so greatly in demand, and which go straight to the root of things; such as whether the Family should be the Unit, whether Property should be recognised any longer, whether Social Science is to allow any longer the payment of Interest on Money, Rent, Profit on Goods sold, and so forth. She is also engaged upon a work which it is believed will revolutionize everything, called "The History and Arraignment of Man." The Cause was languishing for Antoinette Baker. It wanted youth, beauty, feminine grace

and cleverness, besides audacity. It wanted a speaker who could put things pleasantly and wittily. It has been found that man, who always too much regards the exterior, has too often turned away with coldness from apostles middle-aged, hard-featured, harsh in voice and manner, strident, with no grace of womanhood, no softness of style or manner, no pleasantness of style, who represented the claims of Woman before the appearance of Antoinette. She not only brought beauty and eloquence, but she brought also ideas. I know not where she got them from, but they seemed original ideas. She laid down a programme which astonished her hearers and made them gasp. I believe that nobody before Antoinette ever claimed more than a bare equality for the intellect of woman; she, however, went beyond: she claimed superiority. She did this, not in a secret and underhand manner, but openly, unreservedly, freely. She showed her hand.

The people who went to hear this particular lecture were astonished when, at the hour named, there stepped on the platform a slight, delicate-looking girl of twenty-two or so, with sharp, clear-cut features, bright grey eyes, and a mass of short curls. She was dressed in plain white, and wore a *pince-nez*. In her hand she carried a manuscript, but she soon grew tired of reading it, and, folding it up, used it to assist gesture, while with clear, full voice, maintained without effort, she poured out her periods, at the hearing of which the women looked down, and the men stared before them with burning cheeks and in a blind rage.

"What," she asked, "what is man's boasted power compared with ours? He is the wheel which is driven. We should be the piston which drives. What is his insight compared with ours? What his sense of justice, his sympathy, his hatred of cruelty, his disinterestedness compared with our own? How small a thing is his feeble desire to do right compared with our stern resolution that he *shall* do right?"

More—and much more—she said, so that the ears of those who heard tingled, and some girls were ashamed for her, and some went home angry that they—of the chosen sex—had been kept out of their rights so long.

After the lecture there was a reception at Mrs. Branson's, and more was said. The men remarked, with astonishment and exasperation, that their observations were received by Miss Antoinette Baker with that sort of impatient politeness and condescending pretence of respect generally extended by men of learning and authority to the observations made by girls. This upside-down treatment gave them a severe shock. Thus, when the Major remarked, with confidence, that woman had hitherto shown little power of forming judgment, she inclined her head and waited until he had quite finished what he had to say, looking straight in his face with a superior, tolerant air and a smile, which made him very angry.

"I know: it is one of the commonplaces," she said loftily, "ad-

vanced by those who have not studied the question. Let me advise you, Major Thornton, to be guided by those who have. The judgment of man, indeed!" she laughed scornfully. "It is surprising that men should not be ashamed to speak of their judgment. They have ruled for thousands of years. They have settled nothing,—not one question. They are still ignorant as to what is the best form of government, what is the true religion, what are the true laws of social ceremony, what is the right kind of education; they have not yet learned such simple things as the abolition of disease, war, poverty and vice; they have not even agreed in matters of taste."

"Would you kindly teach us," said the Major, "the simple arts of abolishing poverty, war, and vice?"

"Oh! Pardon me. Man's judgment and reason are so strong that they will, I dare say, find out for themselves. When they are candid enough to confess that they cannot, let them come to me—I mean to Us. Believe me, my dear sir, there will never be a final decision on this or any other point until woman's voice is heard throughout the land—yes—woman's voice—low—musical—sweet—telling once and for all what have been the mistakes of the past, and what must be the action of the future. With decision, not with hesitation; with the authority of certainty, not the feebleness of experiment."

"Good Lord!" said the Major.

Miss Antoinette Baker stayed a week. During that time she made a convert and established a Branch.

Mrs. Branson felt from the very beginning that she had heard a new Gospel: she discovered capabilities in herself which she had never before suspected; she burned with new wrath at previously unsuspected wrongs; she longed to master the subject, and dreamed of mounting a platform like her young Apostle, and withering Man with her eloquence.

The Major, during Miss Antoinette Baker's stay, came a great deal in order to discuss a question in which he was resolved not to yield one inch. He made statements and laid down positions. It is an attractive and yet a delicate subject; he went away every day in a rage, all the more because he saw that, though Christina remained unmoved, and regarded the Apostle with unconcealed aversion, her stepmother was more and more carried away by the new doctrines. Finally, when Antoinette went back to London, Mrs. Branson went with her, and stayed a month.

Before she returned she had taken the irrevocable step—she had mounted a platform and made a speech. It was a short one, prepared with anxious care and learned by heart; it was spoken to a Resolution on Women's Suffrage, but it contained the whole creed of the new Party, and was, therefore, commented upon in all the papers. If there is any one thing which women of the New School more desire and yearn after, it is to see their names and opinions

the subject of comment in the papers. If there is one thing in the world which women of the Old School regard with shrinking and horror, it is this publicity. This is the chief difference between the New and the Old School. Christina read, and wept tears of shame: Harry read, and straightway exhausted the interjections of the language. Horrible!

Mrs. Branson came home. No one asked her where she had been, or what she had done. As regards her speech there was profound silence.

Then the Major made a very great mistake. He called with the intention of arguing. Everybody knows the kind of argument which the Major would adopt, and its futility. Everybody knows the kind of thing he would presently say, and the wrath which would speedily arise on both sides. Mrs. Branson was already profoundly hurt and disappointed by the unsympathetic behaviour of her stepchildren: she might have hoped to conquer that; but to be remonstrated with by the Major, who, she had just been taught, belonged to the most malignant type of bigoted Conservative—that was too much.

* * * * *

When he went home after the Row Royal, with the uneasy feeling that somehow he had not got the best of it, either in argument, dignity, or temper, the Major found Christina, Cicely, and Harry sitting dolefully in chairs apart, as at the angles of an equilateral triangle. They were seized with a shameful dismay. As yet they had no thought of what might result from this speech for themselves. Enough for them that their father's widow should have stood upon a platform and uttered sentiments of so revolutionary a kind!

"Harry," said the Major, "this is a very terrible thing for you. Chris, my dear, I pity you with all my heart. I've just come from your stepmother. I thought it my duty, as so old a friend, to say a word. All I have to say now is—there!" He spread his hands and shook his head.

"It *is* a most beastly thing," said Harry, "for one's female relations to turn Prophets. Somehow it makes a man feel a Fool. After all, however, she is not my mother. She is no blood relation, you know, Major, is she? Stepmothers can do what they like."

"No, my boy. She is certainly only your stepmother. But I am very much afraid, after the few words we have just had together, that there may be trouble of another kind before you."

"What trouble?" asked Chris. "Is not this enough?"

"The trouble is," said the Major, "that she has ordered me out of the house, never to enter it again. That I don't mind so much, though it's a pity when a lady one has always respected and admired goes wrong in this horrible way. What I fear is that, in her present temper, she may visit the sins of the father on the children, and turn you out of the house as well, Cis—you and Fred."

They gazed at each other in mute bewilderment. Could she—could she do this thing? But this was—just—exactly what she did. And now you know most of the unhappy story of these poor girls. That is to say, you know all that Christina told her uncle the evening he arrived.

III.

AT HOME AGAIN.

"Come in," said Christina. "Let me show you the way."

"I know it," said her uncle.

He stopped in the hall and looked around. By the light of the lamp, Chris observed that their newly recovered uncle was a man who once had been handsome, and had still what is called a distinguished look. He had straight and regular features, with very bright eyes. When he took off his hat (which he proceeded to hang up as if he was going back to his old peg after an absence of a day or two) Christina observed that his hair, which was still thick and abundant, was gone completely grey. A grey head and a big brown beard make up rather picturesquely together. Christina saw, further, that he had full bright eyes, which ought to have been short-sighted, but were not. He also possessed, which Chris could not see by reason of his thick moustache, a singularly sweet and sensitive mouth.

"You are trying to find out what I am like?" he said. "An old fogey of fifty-two is not much to look at. Let me rather look at you. Yes! You have my father's mouth and my mother's eyes. You are very pretty, my dear." He gently touched her hair as if it was something sacred. "You must try and like me a little, if you can."

Then he opened the door of the library and looked in. The lights were lit, but the room was empty.

"The same books," he said, "and the same old chairs. Well, I am glad that my brother made no alteration. Was he in Holy Orders? Did he succeed my father in the parish?"

"My father in Orders? Oh, no!"

"What did he do, then?"

"He did nothing," replied Christina. "Of course he was not obliged to do anything."

Uncle Jack looked puzzled, but said nothing.

Christina led the way to the drawing-room.

"You will find," she said, "Mrs. Branson here with her friends. When you have talked long enough with her, you will find me waiting for you in the porch, or here. I have a good deal to tell you. Go in and introduce yourself. Unfortunately, I can no longer spend my evenings in the drawing-room."

Her uncle opened the door and stepped in.

He found himself in the large low room, which he remembered so well, only it was now very differently furnished. And in the little tables, dainty chairs, china, and cabinets, there was little to remind him of his mother's old drawing-room, with its heavy round table and chairs stiffly arranged.

He stepped into the room looking about him. Within, as it seemed to him, they were acting a play. There was, sitting in an easy-chair, a middle-aged lady, to whose usually placid features the fervour of recent conversion—though this Uncle Jack did not know—had given a novel and rather incongruous expression of enthusiasm. This passion belongs rightly to the young. She was reading a proof-sheet aloud. Before her stood with a note-book a young lady, dressed in some plain-coloured stuff, made into a costume just exactly as if she were going to take a header from the hearth-rug into mid-ocean. I hope I make my meaning clear; the costume is not in itself unpleasing, but seen in a drawing-room it makes one's head to reel, and one's eyes to swim.

"It's a rehearsal!" said Uncle Jack to himself. "It's mum-micking. And in my mother's drawing-room. She's a page, I suppose. Good Heavens!"

At the table, partly on it, there leaned a youth, though when Uncle Jack looked more closely he perceived that the youth was probably a young lady. She was dressed in a crimson silk jacket, a white silk waistcoat, a plain male shirt front with a diamond stud in it, a cruelty-collar, and white tie: and below, terminating at the knee, a garment which might be called petticoat or divided skirt, or Turkish trousers, or anything you please, so long as you get the true idea of what she wore. Below this garment were white silk stockings, and red leather shoes with gold buckles. She wore double glasses, and had light short curls. She was certainly striking, and even attractive; but her mouth and chin were too strong, and her expression lacked repose. Her features were marked and yet delicate, reminding one rather of an American than of any English type of beauty. She, too, was listening to the pamphlet, but without a note-book.

"A full-dress rehearsal!" said Uncle Jack to himself. 'What the devil does it mean?"

Beside the lady in the jacket and other things aforesaid, there sat a young man—Uncle Jack supposed he must be a young man from the testimony of the upper lip, whereon was a beautiful, small, silky moustache of fair hair, curled, twisted, and oiled, a miracle of art. He was a young man of five-and-twenty or so, of fair pink and white complexion, pale blue eyes, and very light, straight hair, worn long, parted down the middle, and combed behind his ears; he was as handsome in his way as the lady in the waistcoat and collar was in hers. Yet there was a shifty and uncertain look about his eyes; and the lines of his figure wanted, so to speak, a firmer handling. He was clothed in a curious costume, reminding the beholder of *bals*

masqués and visits behind the scenes. It was constructed after the Syrian fashion, and made chiefly of black velvet, with a little lace. It closely resembled the costume of the lady He sat in a long, low armchair, with one leg folded under the other, gracefully suggesting a dallying with Oriental modes.

The elder lady went on reading from her proofs :

"'In short, the whole history of Man's rule has been the long-continued use of the bludgeon. By this he seized on power ; by this he held it. He made laws for his own advantage, and enforced them by the bludgeon. He inculcated his religion, carried on his courtship, ruled his state, and subjected his household—by the bludgeon and the heavy boot.'"

"This is forcible, Antoinette," said the young man with a little lisp, turning to the lady in the crimson silk jacket. "Forcible as well as true—ah! so true—with the bludgeon and the heavy boot."

"I would write up the passage still more strongly," said Antoinette. "It is a side of the question which cannot be shown too clearly."

"'Take from him his bludgeon, his power to do mischief ; forbid him to strike, and he becomes as harmless as——'" Here the lady happened to look up from her proof and saw the stranger standing in the door. Behind him stood Christina. She stared, dropped her paper, sprang to her feet, and held out her hands with a cry of welcome and surprise.

"Jack Branson! Is it really and truly Jack come home again, after all these years ?" She gave him both her hands, which he took and held, looking into her face.

"It is none other. And you—surely—surely you are my old friend Loo Bazalgette, though you were but a slip of a thing when I went away."

"Louise Branson," she said, with something of a blush, because, in truth, there were memories of love-passages between them, and such recollections are always awkward. "I married your brother."

"Ah! then you are mother of that pretty girl who——" He looked round ; but Christina had shut the door and left him.

"Christina is my stepdaughter. I was your brother's second wife," she explained coldly, so that Jack perceived at once that there was something wrong. Then he shook hands with her again.

"I hear from my niece," he said, "that my poor brother is no more. Presently you will tell me all. Is this—this young gentleman"—he pointed to the mummer with the moustache—"my nephew ?"

"I sincerely wish he was, Jack. Your nephew, I am sorry to say, takes a much less serious view of life."

If, Jack thought, taking a serious view of life means dressing up like a Tom Fool at a fair, what can a frivolous view mean ?

"Let me introduce you to my friends," Mrs. Branson continued. "Antoinette, this is my husband's brother Jack, whom we have all

thought dead. Jack, this is Miss Antoinette Baker, the leader of Woman's Cause in this country. She is one of those rare and colossal intellects which it is more than a privilege—an education—to encounter."

"Glad to see you back again, Jack." She held out her hand, which he shook mechanically, feeling as if he must be in a dream.

"In our School," Mrs. Branson went on, "we always address each other by the Christian name, in token of equality. This is Mr. Valentine Vandeleur, one of our disciples, and a most valiant soldier."

Jack thought that never had valour been so carefully disguised.

"You will join us, Jack, before long," said the hero; and Jack longed to have him alone for a few minutes in the open, just to wring his neck for his cheek, yet reflected that one just arrived after thirty years must be prepared to find a good deal that was strange.

"This is our Secretary," said Mrs. Branson, indicating the young lady in the bathing-dress, who bowed and blushed and seemed to be conscious that if things were somehow a little otherwise, she would be happier. But what she wanted did not appear.

"We will go into the library," said Antoinette. "Come, Valentine. Come, Ella. We will leave you to talk about old times. I suppose, Jack," she said, "that in the countries you come from very little is known as yet of the Cause?"

"Very little indeed," said Jack, stroking his big beard.

"If you please you shall become our missionary. He is a fine-looking man, Louise," she said, with a pleasant condescension. "He looks fairly intelligent. I have no doubt that with a little training he might be useful to us."

"You hear, sir? added Mr. Vandeleur. He put his glass in his eye to say it, and what with his little lisp, and his conceit, and his dress, he made Uncle Jack still more long to kick him. "Such a compliment from our leader—the illustrious Antoinette—the most colossal intellect in England—is indeed worth having. Remember that no nobler work exists than to advance the Emancipation of Woman and the Suppression of the Bludgeon. Hasten, sir, to make yourself worthy of such a compliment."

"Good Lord!" said Uncle Jack, recovering as they shut the door.

"You left me, Jack," said Mrs. Branson, "a weak silly girl——"

"You were mighty pretty, too, I remember," added Uncle Jack.

"Oh! Pretty—pretty—what is that? Beauty has no use, my dear brother, except to win young men over to our Cause. It is a weapon, and a very important one, so long as men continue weak: that is, so long as they continue to be men."

"Yes," said Uncle Jack, "that seems quite true. It is a weapon, and a good strong one. But what do you want? What does it all mean?"

"It means, my dear brother," she replied, with flashing eyes, "that we have at last awakened to a sense of our true position, and

are resolved to demand and to enforce our rights. Sit down, and before we say another word, I must read you my pamphlet and make you a convert."

"Never mind the pamphlet, my dear sister. Tell me about my nephew and niece."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Branson, "that I cannot welcome you to a harmonious house. My stepchildren have of late, owing to the influence of a Snake, showed a most disrespectful and disobedient spirit."

Uncle Jack said nothing, but remembered Cicely's mysterious words about a right-minded uncle.

"I must, however—I really must—read you my pamphlet before we begin to talk, if only to show you my present position."

Then Mrs. Branson read her pamphlet. It was a strange welcome. Uncle Jack sat listening, but hearing nothing. After thirty years the house was the same; to him it was full of the ghosts of the past. He had heard his father's voice in the library; his mind was charged with the memories of his youth. He would have been sitting in the dark garden talking with Louise of the bygone days; and here she was stamping up and down the room, brandishing her papers in his face, shouting her arguments with shrill and strident voice. What did it mean? Was the old house turned into a lunatic asylum?

"Thank you," he said, when the paper was finished.

"Have I shaken you?" asked the Enthusiast.

"Very much indeed. But, my dear Louise, no one is made a convert all at once, you know. Put away your papers, and let us talk. I have got thirty years of talk. Let us begin with thirty years ago."

"Thirty years ago, Jack, you were in great disgrace."

"I was."

"You had been rusticated from Cambridge; you were in debt; and you had kissed the curate's daughter—after you had had certain love-passages with—with more than one other girl in the place."

"That is quite true. I was a disgrace, I was told, to the family. So I went away. Looking back, I don't think I had done anything very disgraceful. As for the rustication, it was only for screwing up the Dean; as for the Cambridge debts, they amounted to no more than a hundred or two; and as for poor Evelina and that unlucky kiss, which my father saw from the library window, perhaps too much importance was attached to the deplorable incident."

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"Above all, Jack," said Mrs. Branson, when the first flow of question and answer was subsiding, "now that you have come home, I rely upon you to bring the children to a sense of duty. Pray understand me clearly. I am resolved never to give my consent to any engagement with the children of a man who has so

grossly insulted not me alone, but the Cause, and the Leader of the Cause. Never mind. And you must help me. Otherwise——"

"Well, Louise? Otherwise?"

"Otherwise—Well, Jack, I have been thwarted and misunderstood, where I looked most for sympathy and co-operation. I have my plans for the children. I want your help to bring them to submission. If you give me your help, I shall rejoice that you have returned: if, on the other hand, you—but I trust to your sense, my dear Jack. Only remember: this is no idle fancy. It is, I feel, the worthy work of my life. It is what I shall, henceforward, live for."

"Well," said the returned Prodigal, "I suppose anybody can do what he pleases with his life. It is a free country. But what have your plans got to do with the children? Are not they to have the same freedom?"

"I have my plans for them," Mrs. Branson replied, evading the point of the freedom. "I have no objection to telling you what those plans are. I am not consulting you, understand plainly. Other women consult men. I prefer that men should consult me. I am perfectly able to form my own judgment without asking any man's advice. But I wish to let you know what I propose and intend for them. I have found a husband for Christina and a wife for Harry. If they accept my offer, they will have their fortunes. If they refuse, they will have none. I have this morning told Harry that if Miss Antoinette Baker does him the honour to propose for him——"

"Propose for him?"

"I perceive, Jack, that you are still wrapped in prejudice. We who start with the equality of the sexes, are persuaded that marriages will never be happy until women have as much to say in the matter as men. If woman proves her superiority, of course she will arrange everything for man, including his marriage."

"Quite so. I see. Pray go on."

"If Antoinette, our illustrious Leader—the most clear and the most daring intellect of this or any other age—should stoop to choose poor, ignorant, unintellectual Harry for her husband, I say that he must and shall accept her with gratitude and joy. If Mr. Vandeleur, a gentleman of the greatest wisdom, eloquence, and docility, together with a depth of feeling and a power of insight almost feminine, should propose for Christina——"

"Can't Christina propose for herself?"

"Not until she has become one of us. If—I say——"

"I understand. Christina must accept the offer. These are your projects, then."

"Say, my designs. I have at least power over my stepchildren; and that power, Jack Branson, I promise you they shall feel."

* * * * * *

"She has kept you a long time," said Christina, whom he found

in the porch. "I know not what my stepmother may have told you; but I must tell you the story myself. To-morrow morning I will bring my brother to see you. I want you, to-night, before you meet him, to know the whole history."

There was something so sympathetic in his way of listening, something so reassuring in his voice when he spoke, that, when the girl finished her story, she had already the sense of having found a new friend and a strong protector.

IV.

WILL YOU MARRY ME, MY PRETTY MAN?

NOBODY, I am well aware, talks to himself, except in his sleep. He cannot, in fact, because his thoughts carry him here and there much more quickly than he can put them into words. If Uncle Jack could have spoken at length the things which he thought in a moment of time, his speech might have been something as follows. Words, at the best, even in the hands of a Browning, are, as we know, clumsy things to express thought, though they are, unfortunately, all that we have at present. One of the next great inventions will, I am persuaded, substitute the use of electricity for the interpretation of thoughts, without the necessity of using words at all. This will finally establish the Brotherhood of Humanity, and bring grammarians to everlasting confusion.

"What have I got by coming home?" he might have said, as he sat over a pipe in his hotel that night. "I expected, somehow, to find Sam. Well, Sam is dead. I am sorry. I did not expect to find Loo Bazalgette in his place, and I don't think it makes me glad to find her there. Now I come to think of it, Loo was always as obstinate as a mule. As for that sweet and pretty girl, she will look to me to help her. And what the devil am I to do for her? It seems rather hard, when a man has been thirty years trying, without any luck to speak of, to help himself, that the first thing when he comes home he should be called upon to help somebody else. How the deuce can I help her? Louise has gone as crazed as a March hare. Yet she says she can stop the supplies if they disobey her. Well! They might come back with me. How would that do? They might do worse: but they are both in love and engaged to be married, and perhaps the other side mightn't like it. The girl, if she wasn't too proud, would go very well with the Show—much better than the last girl I had—who was a Duffer. Wonder if she can sing? The last girl couldn't. If I ask her to come, I shall have to own up all, and I meant to keep things dark. They seem to think I've made a fortune. Well, if they please to think I have struck Ile or found nuggets, they may. I shall be so short a time with them that it matters nothing. Besides, it does

a man no harm to be thought rich, and it's quite a new experience, having a little social consideration.

"If the supplies *are* cut off, and they fall back upon me, there would be nothing to offer them except a share in the Caravan. How would Christina take such an offer? As for her brother, I haven't seen him, but if he is like his sister, he would look the walking gentleman to perfection. But there is very little time to spare."

He pulled out his purse and counted the bank-notes in it.

"I don't believe I can stay in the country more than a month at the outside. Then I shall be pretty well cleaned out, except for the passage-money back again. A month! It isn't long after thirty years. As for that other sweet little thing, who looked like a shepherdess in china, she is in love with Harry, and Harry with her, I suppose. Oh! it is no use! I couldn't ask her to join the Caravan. Hang it! I couldn't ask Christina, for the matter of that. Something else must be contrived."

He went on in this foolish rambling way of thought till past midnight. The faces of the two girls haunted him and followed him to bed, and came back to him in dreams, so that in the morning when he got up, it was with the consciousness that, as an uncle thus dropped from the clouds at a most important juncture and crisis, it was absolutely necessary for him to do Something. But what?

It was not until past noon next day that he saw his nephew and niece. The reason of this delay was that they were both otherwise engaged, and in this manner:

First, I do not know whether the arrival of the unexpected Uncle precipitated matters. He wore, certainly, a look, an air, a masterful bearing, and a manner of speech, which were entirely foreign to the Cause, if not hostile to it. Perhaps, when Mrs. Branson spoke of the possibility of certain proposals, she was fully alive to their probability, or even their certainty. Perhaps the parties most interested thought that, this great strong Uncle of unknown wealth having arrived, it might be as well to get matters settled out of hand before he could interfere.

After breakfast, Harry, who had been turned out of his own den to make room for the great Leader, because she required a room for her own work, retired into the garden for his morning pipe, and in order to compose his mind before seeing this unexpected Uncle. It was a large garden, with a lawn for tennis, and on either side of it were walks, orchards, and shady hedges. It was separated from the Major's garden on one side by a low paling, in which, during the days when Brotherly Love Continued, the friends had constructed a door for convenience of communication.

Now, no sooner had Harry filled and lit his pipe than he became aware that Miss Antoinette Baker was slowly descending the stairs which led into the garden from his study (so called because he kept in it his pipes, racquets, bats, silver cups, sculls, and other

trophies of prowess). She was dressed very much as she had been in the evening, except that the silk jacket was changed for a jacket made of a light Umritzur cloth ; the waistcoat was white, only with a little gold edging, and she wore a little red fez cap over her short curls. She looked, in fact, like a pretty Albanian shepherdess at the Royal Italian Opera. She had just lit a cigarette. At sight of her, Harry turned and fled with precipitation. The garden was wide enough, he thought, for both ; he ran quickly into the recesses of the orchard, whither, he thought, she would not follow.

But she did ; she deliberately walked after him. She came into the garden on purpose to have a little talk with him, and she followed him into the recesses of the orchard where he was—well, it looked like hiding—under the apple-trees.

"Harry," she said, "I want to have a little conversation with you. I can spare ten minutes for you. Don't run away again, because it wastes my time. Besides, a young man should try to assume an attitude of equality with a woman, even if he does not feel it."

His cheeks turned pale and his knees trembled. For he knew very well that he was afraid of her : and he also foresaw what she was going to talk about. His stepmother had warned him.

"All my time," he stammered, "is at your disposal."

"That is false," she said. "Young men should avoid unnecessary falsities : compliments and such foolish things. What I have to say will be brief, although I desire you to consider it carefully."

"Pray go on. Will you take a trunk ?" He pointed in agitation to the stump of a tree. "Or do you prefer standing ?"

"I will stand. The subject about which I wish to speak to you, Mr. Branson, is, in fact, your marriage."

"Thank you," Harry replied. "Allow me to say that I have no desire to confer with you upon that subject, or, indeed, upon any other subject relating to myself."

"It concerns me as well as yourself ; for I propose to marry you." She lightly blew away a little cloud of tobacco, and awaited his reply.

"You propose to marry me ?" He knew she was going to say it, but the suddenness and directness of her manner in saying it confounded him.

"Just so. It is still unusual for a woman to offer her hand, but, to my mind, that is only one of the lingering prejudices and superstitions of the past. Besides, I am not an ordinary woman. In the not distant future, instead of waiting to be wooed, and of blushing when they receive an offer, and being forced to hide their real sentiments, women will look about them, if they wish to be married, for a suitable husband, and make the first advances, if the man does not anticipate them."

"Then," said Harry with decision, "let me at once say that I refuse your proposal."

"I knew you would begin by saying that. First, because you are horribly ignorant and prejudiced, and because you are afraid of me. You think you dislike me. Next, because you fancy yourself in love—poor boy!—with that poor little creature Cicely Thornton, who retains what her ridiculous pump of a father calls the modesty of her sex. You will, in any case, have to give her up, because Mrs. Branson will never consent—never, mind—to your marrying a daughter of that very conservative person. Consider—but of course you will—that if you marry her you will become a pauper; if you remain single you will have four hundred a year. But your stepmother informs me that you have contracted certain debts—I know not to what amount—at Cambridge, and that these debts will have to be paid out of that slender income. You know best how much will be left.'

"Oh!" the young man staggered. This was, indeed, an unexpected blow, and he groaned aloud. What signified a few hundreds to a man with a prospective three thousand a year? But, oh! the difference between three thousand and four hundred a year!

"You observe"—she lit another cigarette—"your position will be an extremely disagreeable one. And there is no way out of it for you: no way at all, except one—to marry me."

"Never," he declared.

"To drag on your existence on a pittance of a hundred a year or so—for you will not live any longer at your stepmother's expense; not to be able to marry; to have no work, because, you know, you are a most useless person; and to have no hope, save in the death of your stepmother, who is not yet fifty, and will probably live for thirty years longer—this, Mr. Branson, seems a poor look-out for you."

"It is. And yet I shall not escape by that way."

"I think you will. Not to-day, nor to-morrow. But, perhaps, the day after. When your pretty Cicely—she is not really so pretty as myself, if you count beauty worth anything—gets tired of waiting and goes off with another man; when you get tired of being able to buy nothing that you want, and to do nothing that costs money; then Harry, my dear boy, you will think of me again and of my offer—which remains open to you until I tell you to the contrary."

He made no reply, having a most guilty feeling, in fact, that after all, the thing was just possible, horrible as it seemed.

"You will like me better the more you think of me," Antoinette went on, with a kindly and superior smile. "Particularly when you consider that I am not very anxious about the matter. I offer you a contract on perfectly equal terms—terms as equal as you have a right to expect, considering your intellectual inferiority. I shall certainly not promise or engage to give you any obedience

whatever, nor need you obey me. I shall follow out my own life my own way. I want for that way not so much money as the externals and show of money. That is to say, I want a big house with big rooms to receive my friends. It is the chief reason why I wish to get married, because I am not rich enough to have such a house. Also, it will be better for the Emancipation of Women if I get married. Otherwise I should not have thought about marriage except with horror as a necessity for some poor women who have not the strength of mind or the means to remain single. You shall give me these things, with your name, if I like to use it; in return, I give you your fortune first, which you will not get in any other way: next, a career if you wish; we want young men of education, good birth, and good manners for the Cause; but if you will not join us you can go your own way. I shall only insist upon one thing—that you take no active part against us. And I contract that my marriage, as it will be entered upon solely in our joint interests, shall be terminated, in those interests, whenever we please."

"There," said Harry weakly, "the Law unfortunately interferes."

"The Law!" she replied contemptuously. "What has the Law to do with me? If I please I shall continue to live with you. When we are tired of each other we shall part. What will it matter to you? The estates will continue your own, whether I continue with you or whether I go away by myself."

"Have you anything more to say?" asked Harry, feeling very feeble.

"No. I think nothing more. I might, perhaps, say something more about myself, merely to remove any little feeling of wounded vanity on your part. I am not hideous, nor am I old; and I am clever. A twelvemonth with me in the free and emancipated air which I breathe among my friends will make a man of you. It will indeed. Why, here you are not a man; you are only an aggravated schoolboy, whose hours are all play hours. Come out of this tepid bath; get rid of your old superstitions; dare to love a woman who dares to think that she is a great deal cleverer than you or than most men; listen to the new principles of Society from a woman who carries a latchkey, lives alone, has cast off petticoats, and is neither afraid for her personal reputation, nor her personal safety. Remember, when you please, I will make such a man of you as now you little dream of."

She left him standing under an apple-tree, bewildered, humiliated, and, to say the truth, terrified. Would this girl, then, marry him against his will? There was a look of resolution in her eyes which seemed to say that she was capable of anything—even that. One has read of a girl being haled to the altar and forced into compliance with the rites and vows prescribed for the faithful, but never—nowhere in history or fiction (which is much more remarkable than

history) is there a case of a young man, a rich young man, being forced to marry against his will a young woman. She did not pretend to love him, to respect him, to entertain any idea about him but the calm contempt with which one greatly superior in intellect may regard one much inferior; it was in a way a good-natured contempt: he was, in her eyes, a poor creature with certain possibilities which she would develop in that bracing atmosphere of Emancipated Women of which she spoke. A new morality, a new religion (or had they not agreed to do without religion altogether?), a new departure in Society, new standards of taste, new methods of government—all these he was to face, to learn, to understand. So great a terror filled his soul that he felt like one pursued of devils, who flies to the church, and lays hold upon the horns of the altar. To be pursued by a resolute woman, if you come to think of it, very much resembles that other pursuit and flight, because in neither case can you lay about with stick, sword, battle-axe, or hammer, as you can when pursued by cannibals, for instance, on being wrecked upon a desert island.

In his terror and distress Harry did not dare even to get out of the garden by the usual mode: he fled: he opened the gate which led to the Major's domains, and rushed headlong to find Cicely.

"Cis," he cried, grasping her hand, "the detestable woman has done it at last. She has done—what my stepmother threatened—what I feared: she has proposed to me."

"Harry!" Is there safety for any girl if her lover is actually to receive offers of marriage from strange goddesses? "Harry, she has never dared!"

"She has—she tells me that she is resolved to marry me. Cis, I feel as if I were going off my head."

"Come, Harry," said Cis, with determination in her face. "This shows us that steps must be taken at once. Things have come to a head. Let us go and tell your Uncle Jack everything. Oh! he looks splendidly strong."

Meantime another discourse was maintained between Christina and Mr. Vandeleur. In those days of rebuke, when there was no longer even the semblance of harmony in the house, Christina used to sit all the morning in the drawing-room, where she was generally undisturbed, the Champions of the Cause being busy forging thunderbolts in the library.

On this morning, full of her Uncle's return, and burning to tell him the tale which she was sure had been already told by her stepmother from her own point of view, she sat there waiting till it was a seemly time to call upon a man at his hotel. While she sat meditating in sadness not unmixed with hope, because this Uncle looked so strong a man, such a trusty pillar to lean upon, she saw in the door the dreaded vision of Mr. Valentine Vandeleur. He wore this morning the costume of the ordinary Englishman; but in his

hand he bore a lily, which he laid, without a word of greeting, compliment, or explanation, in Christina's lap.

She threw it out of the window.

"I knew you would," he said with a profound sigh; "it is proof that you understand as yet so little about me;—about my aspirations."

"On the contrary," she replied, "I understand too much about you." She got up. "You drive me from the only room in the house where I can find peace. Why do you not go and sit with your illustrious Leader—a *man*, and to be led by a woman!—and my stepmother, and the Secretary?"

His face flushed and he smiled uneasily. Then he went on, holding his hands up before his shoulders and bowing as he spoke, and bringing out his words daintily.

"I come here," he went on, "because I wish, so very much wish, that you should understand me better, and because I have a proposal to make to you with your stepmother's full consent."

"No." Christina moved towards the door, but he stood in her way. "I can guess what your proposal is before you make it. Do not trouble yourself to make it. No, sir—No—No—No. NEVER! Is that plain?"

"It is quite plain. Yet I am not dismissed. Had you said 'Yes,' with your present imperfect knowledge of me, it would have argued an untruthful nature. Now with a candid soul one can do so very much."

"You will do nothing with me, Mr. Vandeleur."

"Oh, yes. When you have ceased to respect the rude barbaric qualities which you have been taught to associate with Man; when you have learned to look upon me—me—as the type of the Coming Man: cultivated, humble, aiming at the feminine graces, grafted on the masculine muscles——"

"To me this talk," said Christina, "is worse than silly. It is beneath contempt."

"Perhaps. You will, at least, do me the honour of listening. In the New School we have decided that Love—of the old-fashioned kind—must be abolished. There must be no passion, because, when passion appears, inequality comes too, and (owing entirely to their education) women are at present the more prone to passion, and therefore the more easily imposed upon. Under the old *régime*, as was once truly said, '*il y a toujours un qui aime et l'autre qui est aimé.*' That is now abolished. Marriage, however—that is to say, the marriage of the future, which will be a partnership terminable at will—is desirable for many reasons. I want, let us say"—he airily spread his hands abroad—"money. I have little money of my own. I give in exchange for money—ability, a poetic imagination, and eloquence. A woman who marries me will be proud of me."

"Indeed," said Christina. "I should not have thought that any woman could, under any circumstances, be proud of you."

"Yes—when that woman has risen to our heights, and understands my position on those heights—which you, Christina, do not understand. I offer that woman, besides my hand, perfect freedom of action, speech, and belief. Should we prove tired of each other we separate."

"And the wife's money?" asked Christina. "Will that separate too?"

"There will be settlements," the suitor replied. "Of course, there will be settlements."

"Pray go on," she replied coldly.

"You know not, Christina, you cannot, indeed, know the splendid work for which we would enlist your sympathy and expend your fortune. The equality of the sexes! Our illustrious Leader goes farther; but into this we need not enter. As a man, I would plead the equality of woman, but am not prepared to admit, until she proves it, her superiority. How noble a career to spend one's life in proclaiming this new and irresistible gospel!"

"I prefer the old gospel of the Perfect Man," said Christina.

"Let us not touch on religion. Let us not argue at all. Let us feel. Let us bow down before the crushing superiority of the gigantic intellect which guides us—the divine Antoinette."

"Thank you," said Christina. "I do not find her intellect so crushing."

"Prejudice, ah! prejudice," he sighed. "Christina, if you wish, I will make love to you in the old manner. I have done it before—I dare say I could do it again."

"Oh!" Christina shuddered. "*You* make love! You poor and padded imitation of a woman!"

His face darkened.

"Then let me only point out," he went on, "how melancholy is your present position. An offended stepmother, whose consent will be withheld until you marry a man whose principles she approves; a poor two hundred a year as long as you remain single: nothing if you marry. The consciousness that if you do marry all your fortune will go to her. Reflect. I know that you are engaged to another man. That engagement is not binding without your stepmother's consent. You will, therefore, if you desire to marry him, have to wait while he climbs his slow way up the ladder. There will come very soon a time when you will be weary of waiting. You will cease to live in this house; your brother will not be able to help you. Your friends will fall off; your lover will be tired of waiting. Perhaps, then, if it is not too late, you will remember that Valentine Vandeleur has offered you his hand."

"Thank you. Till I do find it necessary to remember that, let no more be said."

"I do not pretend or promise to keep my offer open. I am to be the Poet of the new Cause. As we extend our influence, so will the fame of my poetry extend. I dare say I shall find other girls with

perhaps larger fortunes, kinder hearts, and a more worthy conception of their position as women." He bowed with dignity and retired.

Christina sank back into her chair with a feeling almost like that which oppressed at the same instant her brother. Then she sprang to her feet, snatched up her hat, and swiftly fled. There was no help anywhere, except in the newly-found Uncle.

He was standing on the lawn in the garden of the hotel, waiting for his niece, and wondering what he could do for her.

As Christina rushed upon him on the right, Cicely, dragging Harry with her, precipitated herself upon him from the left.

"Oh! Uncle Jack," Christina seized one hand, "the wretch has proposed to me!"

"Uncle Jack," Cicely caught the other hand, "the woman has proposed to Harry! And she threatens——"

"He threatens——" said Christina, breathless.

"That unless he marries her——"

"Unless I marry him——"

"He shall go out into the cold and starve——"

"Cold—and starve," Chris repeated plaintively.

"What *should* we do," cried Cicely, "without you? Oh! that a long-lost uncle"—she clasped his arm with her dainty fingers, and looked up so sweetly in his face that he could not choose but kiss her—"I mean that Harry's long-lost uncle should come back in the nick of time, with rupees in lakhs and sacks!"

"Humph!" said Uncle Jack.

It was a pretty picture, this rugged veteran with an imploring girl clinging to either arm, turning his face first to one and then the other.

"Only tell me," he said, planting his foot firmer, as one about to fight, "only tell me, my dears, what I am to do."

Then he became aware of Harry's presence. That young man was flushed, angry, and humiliated. If you come to think of it, a man can suffer few humiliations greater than to receive a proposal; and, in this case, couched in terms of such superior contempt as to make it intolerable; moreover, he was ashamed of having been afraid.

"Harry," said Uncle Jack, "shake hands, my boy."

"Uncle Jack," said Harry, adding to the chorus, "we rely upon you."

"My dear boy," Uncle Jack replied with effusion, "rely away. Go on relying. But tell me what to do."

While they were talking there came striding across the lawn a white-haired elderly gentleman with a red face, whom Jack at once recognised as the Major.

"Mr. Branson," he began, shaking hands in the most friendly manner, "Mr. Branson, or rather, if you will allow me to call you so, Jack Branson, I look upon your return at this juncture as most

fortunate, truly fortunate—at the very moment when a protector was wanted for these young people, and an adviser of more wit than myself. Everybody who knew of your existence thought you were dead long ago. That is—but never mind; I'm glad, sir, to see you back again"—he used a qualifying word to the adjective ("Barrack manners," Mrs. Branson would have said)—"glad I am, indeed; though till yesterday I never knew anything about you. You have come back, sir, in the very nick of time. Now we have got somebody to bell the cat—I mean, the Tabby who pretends to be a Tom. Hang me if the world isn't turned upside down! And I must say, sir—a very different person to your poor brother, who, towards the end, hadn't a crow left in him—begging your pardon, Chris, my beauty. Now you are come, sir, we'll—we'll—demme—we'll make mincemeat of 'em!"

"Major, we will," said Uncle Jack. "Cheer up, my dears! Mincemeat is the word. Though hang me if I know how!"

V.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

THEY proceeded to hold a council of war.

"Now," said the Major, summing up the situation, "we've got an exasperated woman to deal with: consequently she is obstinate. And she is a new convert to her pernicious doctrines: consequently she is red-hot. As regards her refusal to give consent, that I have expected for a long time: in fact, ever since she perceived that we were not going to be converted, too. But that she should impose suitors of her own, and actually make an impudent attempt to get the whole of the money for her accursed Cause, that I confess I did not expect. Mr. Branson, we shall be very glad of your advice, if you have any to offer; and your help, if you have any to give. The situation you know. As regards the lovers here, Harry can play a quantity of games, but he can't make money. My boy hopes to make his way, but hasn't begun yet. My fortune is not large, and will not be divided between my children till I die; and I'm not in any hurry to do that. Now, sir, what do you propose?"

"First of all," said Uncle Jack, trying to get time, "I should like to know if you have yourself formed any ideas."

"Ideas, sir?" The Major banged the table. "I am full of ideas. I would bring an action against her for—for—anything you like to call it. I would turn her out of the house and defy her; I would lock her up in a private lunatic asylum, and tickle the soles of her feet with a feather till she gives in. That was the old-fashioned method, and it had its good points, sir."

"So it had; so it had," said Uncle Jack. "You know the country better than I do, Major; but I should have thought that way wouldn't

quite do. However, if everything else fails, we might think of the feather. Suppose we diplomatise?"

"What is that?" asked Christina; "and how do you do it?"

"It is Latin, my dear, for saying what you do not mean, and doing what you have not promised. I was thinking, for instance, perhaps if Harry would consent to make love to the He-woman, and Chris would receive the attentions of the She-man——"

"No," said Christina firmly.

"No," said Harry resolutely.

"Of course I only mean in make-believe. You might pretend, Harry——"

"No," said Harry, shuddering; "I could not."

"For a few days only while we mature our plans, and to give us time to mask our intentions. I have no doubt, for instance, that as soon as they were lulled into security we might devise a plan for extorting consent—I don't quite see how at present; or for substituting other papers—I don't clearly see what for the moment; or for getting clear proofs that she is *non compos*—which I fear would be very difficult."

Christina shook her head, and begged him not to think of that method.

Then Cicely sprang to her feet with a cry of triumph.

"I have it!" she said breathlessly. "Oh! an idea! Uncle Jack, did you—did you know her when she was young and—perhaps—tolerably pretty?"

"Certainly I did. She was really pretty, not tolerably pretty in those days."

"Couldn't you, then, make love to her—only make-believe love, you know, and pretend you are going to marry her, and coax the consent out of her?"

"Bravo, Cis!" cried Harry. "You have hit it. That's the very way."

"Nothing," said the Major, "like a woman's wit. I didn't know you were so clever, my dear."

"Beautiful!" said Chris. "Begin at once, dear uncle."

They all gazed at each other with smiling faces—Cis trying to look as if her own cleverness did not surprise her in the least. Why, the thing was as good as done. No one could possibly resist Uncle Jack; he was so big and so strong, his eyes were so soft, his beard was so silky, and his hair so grey; after all, it takes a woman really to understand a woman. Everybody felt, without the necessity of saying it, that Mrs. Branson, in spite of her obstinacy, her new doctrines, and her exasperation, was known to be but a weak woman if her vanity was roused. Uncle Jack's face alone lengthened and his brow clouded.

"Yes," said Cis, at once descending to details; "you will begin at once. Go away and take out of your boxes all your bracelets, boomerangs, bangles, beads, and corrobberys, kangaroos, and wagga-

waggas. Tell her you have brought them all home—every one—on purpose to lay at her beautiful feet—she thinks she has got little feet. And don't forget, please, that she thinks her eyes quite too lovely. Say something about her beautiful eyes."

"Stop—stop!" said Uncle Jack, his face brightening like a meadow under an April sun. "Stop, it can't be done."

"Why not?" they all asked in chorus. "Why can't it be done?"

"Because she's a deceased wife's sister: that is to say, a deceased brother's wife, which is, I take it, much the same thing."

"Dear me!" said the Major, "so she is; and I am afraid it is an objection. If we could wait till next year, very likely the Lords will bring in a Bill—— But perhaps you might promise—pretend, you know—to go to Germany."

"I couldn't think of proposing such a thing," said Uncle Jack, with decision.

As no one knew what were Uncle Jack's religious convictions—he looked brave enough to believe anything—there was silence, and Cis felt that she was not so clever, after all, as she had thought herself. It is a saddening thing when the truth comes home.

"Perhaps, then," said Christina, "Uncle Jack wouldn't mind making love to Antoinette. There is no such objection in her case."

"Don't ask him, Chris," said Harry. "Don't! It is too awful. I wouldn't ask my worst enemy to do such a thing."

"What," asked Uncle Jack, "if the Major were to be converted?"

"It is too late," said the Major. "She means, now, to have the money for the Cause. A month ago my conversion might have produced the happiest results, and we could even all five have pretended conversion."

"I have not been told yet," observed Uncle Jack, "how much money there is."

"Good Heavens!" said the Major. "Not to know the money in your own family? Why, sir, it is three thousand a year for this young fellow, and sixteen thousand for Chris."

"How did my brother get it, then? When I was at home we had no more money than came to my father from his benefice; we were just poor church rats. When I went to Australia it was with fifty pounds in my pocket."

"It was my grandfather's first cousin, who died without children, and left his estate to him," Harry exclaimed. "I believe it was a few years after you went away. They advertised for you."

"I was in the bush, I suppose," said Uncle Jack. "Well, it was a great stroke for my brother. And it is a tremendous pot of money; much too big to be thrown away, Harry."

"I'll throw everything away, everything—except Cis," said Harry grandly.

"Oh!" Cis looked things unutterable, and her eyes filled with tears, and Uncle Jack's heart swelled out within him for sympathy. He really was a most kind-hearted man.

"One thing," he said, springing to his feet, "one thing I can do, and will. I will go to my sister-in-law, and try to move her better feelings."

"She hasn't got any," said the Major. "She has lost them—since her conversion."

"I will appeal to her pity, her sympathy, her common-sense."

"You might as well ring the bells in an empty house," said Harry.

"She was young herself once."

"She has forgotten it," said Christina.

"And I suppose she has had lovers in her time, without counting her husband."

"I cannot believe it," said Cicely. "Old ladies who have had lovers are always delightful."

"At all events, I will try."

He did try. He might just as well have tried to pierce the Channel Tunnel with arguments in its own favour.

Consider her position. Consider the position of every female reformer. It is one of perpetual exasperation and white heat. She pays heavy penalties for glory. First, she not only sees her name in print (a thing which she very soon learns to delight in), but also, which no one ever grows to like, sees it connected with scoffing and unkind remarks. She is actuated by the purest and highest motives, and the basest and lowest are imputed to her. When she has convinced herself that she is a martyr and a confessor, she reads coarse insinuations that her real motives are vanity, desire for notoriety, and a determination to be talked about at all risks and hazards. These things have their sting, even to the toughest skin. Next, she is always having her strongest and most telling arguments treated as rubbish, and her rhetoric as froth. Lastly, in poor Mrs. Branson's case, and in too many such cases, her own people refused to accept her mission. She went home after her speech with the shouts of the audience ringing in her ears, and was received with down-dropped eyes and looks of shame and reproach. The speech separated her from her step-children. It made a breach which widened every day. She tried to convert them, but in vain. They only laughed and scoffed in the heedless way common to unthinking youth.

"I offer you a career, Harry," she said: "a noble and brilliant career. We want young men to strengthen us. Be one of them."

"Not I," Harry replied. "Besides, I am not in search of a career."

"Oh!" she replied with contempt. "You would rather, I suppose, spend your life in playing cricket."

"I would," he said without hesitation, "much rather. Especially if Cicely were looking on."

Christina was no better. She said, coldly, that she would not even discuss subjects on which Fred held opinions so strong; and that, for her own part, she was perfectly well satisfied with the position already occupied by women of the better kind.

Most unfortunate it was that both of them alluded to their love affairs, because it helped to make their stepmother regard the engagements as the cause of what she easily persuaded herself was rank rebellion and shameful, undutiful disrespect.

"Loo," Uncle Jack pleaded, with his softest voice, "Loo! I have just come from a long talk with the children. I have learned the whole story."

"They know my determination," said Mrs Branson.

"Yes; they know what you have told them. But I cannot think you mean to abide by your words."

"Indeed I do," she replied, with a short laugh. "I desire you to be quite sure that I shall abide by my words."

"Think of the old days, Loo, when you were young yourself. What would you have said if a lover had been found for you?"

"I dare say, if he was a reasonably good lover, I should have accepted with a proper sense of gratitude."

"If I remember right, Loo, you would have preferred choosing your own lover. But there is another thing. The freedom you claim for yourself you must give others."

"The authority given to me I must exercise," she said firmly.

"My brother when he gave you that authority never contemplated the present position of things."

"That," said the widow, "is beside the mark. If my husband were living now he would hold my opinions still, as he always did."

Much more he argued with her, but in vain. She came back to the same thing—her authority. And she was resolved to use that authority in securing her stepchildren's fortune for the Cause.

Then Uncle Jack lost his temper, and called his sister-in-law names, such as unreasonable woman, and cruel stepmother, and her friends he spoke of as mischievous Bedlamites, and the children he commiserated as victims of a foolish craze. Candid things of this kind were exchanged on both sides with considerable spirit. Finally, Mrs. Branson concluded the arguments, and summed up the debate.

"You may tell the disobedient and rebellious pair," she said, "that they must at once submit or leave my house. These are my last words. As for you, I leave you to make up to them, as best you can, for the loss of their fortunes."

"Whatever I can do, I will do," said Jack. "Meanwhile, their money is not yours yet. Not yet, remember. The inheritances of children are not to be stolen. Yes—stolen is the only word—in such a fashion. You will find that justice can be done in spite of you."

"I cannot tell," said Antoinette, when these words were

reported to her, "what he is to do. But I think somehow that we have managed badly. It would have been better, perhaps, to have approached the boy through his vanity, and the girl through her sense of justice. You can always make any man do anything you please if you work on his vanity, and every woman to believe whatever you want if you can only persuade her that somebody or other is being cruelly wronged. It is in this way that all the burning questions are got up. In this way I shall make our own a burning question. We shall see, however. He is a strong man, Loo, and he means fighting. But I don't quite see how he is going to fight us."

"I believe," said Uncle Jack, returning to the Council, "I believe I have done the best thing possible for us."

"Oh! brave Uncle Jack!" cried Christina.

"She is inexorable. I used every argument I could think of. All in vain. She is revengeful: she feels she has been laughed at. So I have declared open war!"

Open War!

Thus in a single day did this masterful Uncle Jack appear, win the confidence of these young people, espouse their cause, hurl defiance at the foe, and become their champion.

"Did ever," cried Cicely with enthusiasm, "did ever anyone hear tell of such an Uncle Jack?"

VI.

OPEN WAR.

The girls fell back, contemplating with awe and admiration this uncle, who was going to pull everybody out of the mess. How splendid it is to have strength and courage! And how much, thought the Major, by no means a coward, does it help a man to have the rupees at his back! Already the report had spread abroad, and was implicitly believed, that Jack Branson, the prodigal son of thirty years' standing—so long a period immensely increased his prodigality, because it was only the elderly people who remembered him, and they spoke of him with a kind of shudder—had come home again, laden with spoils. Some said that he had struck oil in Pennsylvania, and another that he was chief owner of a silver mine—a Bonanza—a Boom—in Nevada, and some that he had great possessions in Australia. All were agreed that he was enormously wealthy, and the ladies who collect for local societies and for schools and hospitals, and the benevolent schemes of the place, and all those who fuss around, were making up their minds how much they should ask him for. In the end, nobody got anything at all out of Uncle Jack, as you shall see.

"Yes," he repeated, "war to the knife!"

"No surrender!" cried Cis; "Harry, nail our colours to the mast!"

Provided you have full confidence in your general, war to the knife, until you get knifed yourself, is a truly exhilarating pastime.

The General proceeded to issue his orders.

"First of all," he said, "you are both of you ordered to leave the house immediately."

"Has she turned us out?" Harry asked, and Christina turned pale.

"She has; therefore you must both of you go home at once, and proceed with as much fuss and racket as you can to bring your traps out into the street, and deposit them on the pavement. Never mind about packing them up. The Major and I will mount guard. Cicely will put on her hat, and tell the story around the town, how Mrs. Branson has made her two friends propose to you, and how, because you refuse, she has turned you out of the house. We will begin, at least, with the popular feeling on our side. When you have got together your little all, Chris, you might sit on the box and weep."

"We can all weep," said the Major. "A procession in tears carrying the boxes would be effective. I will receive the exiled orphans."

"This is something like war!" said Cicely. "Can't we duck Antoinette in the pond for daring——"

"Vindictiveness," said Uncle Jack. "We might put Mr. Vandeleur under the pump—indeed, it would certainly do him much good—but hardly Miss Antoinette Baker. This done——"

"This done," the girls repeated, because he hesitated.

"This done—I am—I am going up to London."

A tame step—merely going to London—compared with the picturesque and decided one of turning yourself out of your own house.

"Yes: I am going to London. I have got an idea. I do not know whether the idea is worth anything, but I think it may be. If it is not we must find another, and if necessary another still. And if we fail after all——"

"But we can't fail," said Cicely. "Now we have got you, I feel as if we are perfectly safe. I used to believe in papa; but, you see, poor man, he went and set up Mrs. Branson's back at the very beginning by arguing with her, and getting angry."

"I did," said the Major.

"Besides," Cicely went on, "when a man has been out of England for thirty years, what a prodigious quantity of things he must know!"

It is a useful superstition, and greatly helps English enterprise; but, on the whole, I think that the man who stays at home generally rolls up more knowledge than the man who goes away.

The programme was faithfully carried out. Presently, Mrs. Bran-

son, sitting with her friends in the library, forging thunderbolts about the Emancipation of the Sex, was disturbed by a great trampling of feet and the sound of many voices. On going into the hall to inquire into the causes of this phenomenon, she observed her stepson Harry tugging great boxes down the stairs and into the street. On the landing stood her stepdaughter laden with dresses. In the hall was Uncle Jack, directing. On the steps stood the Major—the Snake in the grass; and the pavement was covered with trunks, dresses, books, boots, bats, racquets, oars, guns, and every kind of property peculiar to youth of both sexes. A small crowd of people, young ladies chiefly, were gathered on the pavement, their faces expressing the deepest sympathy; among them was Cicely, daughter of the Snake. In the road stood a small band of boys, eager to witness any show which can be seen for nothing. These horrible creatures whistled, danced, sang, shouted, and groaned. Mrs. Branson comprehended the whole. It was Rebellion and Defiance, headed, instigated, encouraged, and sustained by none other than Jack Branson himself. He had returned, then, for no other purpose than to encourage the disobedience of the children! She remembered, as she retreated, the old masterfulness of the man, and his courage. He would make the children resist to the end. Be it so. But she returned to the library trembling; and tears were in her eyes. Though she loved notoriety and the publicity of platforms, a family fight, she thought, ought to be conducted *à huis clos*, for very decency.

"Come, Louise," said Antoinette, "you need not be annoyed. The whole thing is settled. They must submit, and come to terms."

"But if they do not?"

"Then the whole of this fortune, my dear Louise, will drop into your hands, and we will use it for our own purposes, without the incumbrance of husbands or wives. If, however, as is possible, you still retain any kindness for your stepchildren, I think you may be quite certain that they will come to no harm. Perhaps the uncle is rich, and will keep them; perhaps they will remain single for a time—it will not be for long; perhaps they will marry and forfeit their fortunes. Let them go, my dear. Trouble yourself no more about them."

"It is all very well," the poor obstinate lady replied with a sigh. "You do not know what those children have been to me, Antoinette. And as for Christina, until her recent disobedience, not one cloud ever came between us." But she hardened her heart all the more.

Here there were more groans.

"Oh!" she cried; "this is dreadful."

"What is dreadful? The noise of a dozen street boys? Come, Louise, show more courage."

But she turned very pale, and held on hard by the arms of her chair, when the chorus of groans swelled louder and louder as the

orphans, having collected their things, gave them over to the boys to be carried into the Major's house.

This public demonstration seemed a sensational, and therefore a dubious kind of thing to do; but Uncle Jack protested that, to people who yearn continually for notoriety, nothing is so terrifying as a little notoriety of the wrong kind, and that to Mrs. Branson, whatever the effect might be upon her friends, this manifestation of popular feeling, however elementary, rude, and in bad taste, would certainly produce a most painful, if not a wholesome effect. Painful it certainly was; but not wholesome, because she was only the more confirmed in her wrong-doing.

Uncle Jack, the rebels being safely housed with the Major, went to London, carrying with him his idea, which on the way turned out to be a fool of an idea, and not worth the trouble of taking to town at all. He might just as well, therefore, have stayed where he was, because, when he arrived at his terminus, he was without the least glimpse or notion of what was to be done next.

"Good Lord!" he thought, "I have made a very pretty mess. What on earth am I to do now? If, after all this brag, I should have to tell those two poor girls that I'm a humbug and a sham, and that there is nothing left but to give in, I wish I hadn't come home at all. And yet it is delightful to think of them and their pretty, innocent confidence. At all events, they have time to look about them. As for me, if in three weeks or so I can't find a way to help, I shall have to go back again feeling more like a whipped cur than I ever thought possible. Oh! Christina and Cicely, if you only knew!"

When he was gone, there came a time of flatness, with doubt, anxiety, and a gazing upon each other in silence, their eyes saying, what they were afraid to put into words, "How if Uncle Jack should fail?"

For a whole fortnight there were no signs of him. The girls began to think that perhaps he was a phantom uncle—a trick of the brain. But it is not often that so many people agree in seeing a ghost. Why did he not write or come back?

Meantime, Mrs. Branson made no sign of yielding; every day the Secretary went forth carrying a sack of letters devoted to the Cause, and the postman staggered to the door daily with another sack. Miss Antoinette Baker, whether grown bolder, or wishing to impress the multitude, or with the secret design of catching Harry unawares and marrying him before he had time to run away, walked every morning in the front garden, a cigarette between her lips, dressed in her most audacious and extraordinary costume of divided skirt, dainty jacket, lace cuffs, silk waistcoat, a manly shirt-front, and a little crimson ribbon. Over her short curls she wore the little Albanian cap in which she proposed to Harry. It was a costume so dazzling, and the illustrious Leader's face was so regular in its calm and tranquil beauty, that the folk were bewildered.

"I hate her, Chris," said Cicely. "Oh! I hate her; most, because she really is so pretty. What if Harry were really to take a fancy to her!"

"My dear, he *couldn't;* even if he were not in love with you."

"Ah! Chris, you don't know; men are very different to us—why, I once heard of a gentleman kissing a dressmaker! My heart would break if Harry was to go after that shameless, impudent—Oh! not even Uncle Jack could set things right then."

"War to the knife," said the Major, "means secret strategy. No one must know our plans; we shall have to guess the plans of the enemy."

He tried to look as if he knew their own plans, but would die rather than reveal them.

He knew, however, nothing. What was still more strange, was that all this time Fred Thornton, Christina's lover, wrote only once or twice, and then dark mysterious letters, enjoining her to have faith and patience—faith and patience.

At last, a letter came. Uncle Jack addressed it to Christina, but began "My dear girls," so that it was meant for both. He said that he had been more successful than he could possibly have hoped, and that he was now able to tell them that they might cast away all fear, and be married as soon as they pleased. And he bade them instantly make their arrangements so as to be married on the following Thursday, by which day all his business would be completed. With this letter came another, also for Christina. It was from her lover, and informed her that the wedding-day being fixed for Thursday, he proposed to go down with Uncle Jack on the Wednesday. There was more in the letter which concerned Christina alone, and she read that part of it twenty times, each time with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Wedding next Thursday?" The girls read the letter again. "Wedding next Thursday? Oh! it is impossible!" said Christina.

"Quite impossible," said Cicely, with sparkling eyes. "But—since Uncle Jack orders it."

"Wedding next Thursday?" cried the Major. "Impossible! Wedding next Thursday—my own children's wedding to be ordered and fixed—and I not to be consulted?"

"Wedding next Thursday!" said Cis firmly. "Uncle Jack says so. Why, papa, here is his letter."

"Next Thursday?" repeated the Major. "Upon my word, this is very peremptory."

"Dreadful!" said Cis. "Are we slaves, that we are to be married whenever this Uncle Jack chooses to order? Oh! Chris, my dear, is there time? and who are to be the bridesmaids? My dear, there isn't a moment to lose. Papa," she jumped up, "manage your own department, but leave us to ours. Oh! how shall we get everything

ready by next Thursday? Only a week. Come upstairs, Chris. We must have out all our things. What an Uncle Jack! What a terrible Uncle Jack!" And, arrived in their own rooms, the girls embraced each other, Cis crying, "What a dear Uncle Jack! Because, Christina, my dear, there will be no safety for any of us—and especially for Harry—till we are married, and can defy them to do their worst. Nothing but marriage will make my Harry safe from that awful woman." The Major said no more, but obeyed.

Then there began throughout the length and breadth of the town a hurrying to and fro, and a whispering, and an ordering, and an advising, and a consulting, and a rushing together hastily of dressmakers, and persons skilled in the mystery of fitting, devising, and constructing that edifice known as a bridal costume, and an agitation among the other eight-and-twenty marriageable maidens, and a flutter and excitement to know who were to be the bridesmaids. And it presently became known, not only that the wedding would be as beautiful as could be managed in the brief space left, but that two—or some said four—groomsmen, all rich, handsome, young, and good-tempered, were coming down for it. The confectioner worked day and night, taking no rest, he and his apprentices, in his confectioning. The dressmakers put on all hands, and served out green tea till two o'clock in the morning, and wages were doubled, and needles flew fast as the tongues of those who worked, and the florists sat up all night to make bouquets. The girls and the curates wreathed the church with flowers, and popular enthusiasm hoisted Venetian masts between the Major's villa and the church porch. Also, some one in the dead of night broke two panes of glass in Mrs. Branson's windows. But this act was generally condemned, and set down to the bad taste of intemperate zeal.

The rumour reached her, quickly enough. That the children should have left her was bad to bear, and only to be accounted for by the malign influence of their uncle; that they should thus openly, and without even going through the form of asking for her consent, be married in the face of the world was more surprising still.

"I confess, Louise," said Antoinette, "that it is difficult to understand. There must be something behind. Is your brother-in-law prepared to let four thousand a year and more go to you without an effort to save it? Is he a Crœsus?"

"Heaven knows!" replied the stepmother. "He may be so rich as not to mind it."

"In that case, it is a clear windfall for the Cause. But in any case it is ours already. The law is quite clear. You have given no consent; you have not even been asked for consent; if they both marry without your consent the whole estate is your own. Very good. It *is* already ours. Louisa, I shall take a house, I think, in Eaton Square. What we want are large rooms, and plenty of them.

We shall then have afternoons, evenings, concerts, *soirées*, perhaps private theatricals, all through the season. We shall also——"

"Pardon me, Antoinette," said Mrs. Branson coldly; "you will allow me a voice in my own affairs. I shall deal, if you please, as I choose with my own fortune."

"Oh!" Antoinette, generally so calm, was somewhat disconcerted. "Well, Mrs. Branson, if you like to go your own way you can, of course. At the same time, every Cause must have its Leader. If you are prepared to follow my leadership, you will obey me as to the disposition of this income as well as of all other matters. If not, go your own way, find your own society—without me. We can do well enough without you; but you will find it very difficult, my dear, to do without me."

What more would have happened I know not, because the conversation was interrupted by no other than Jack Branson himself. It was Wednesday, and he was back again.

Now Antoinette had at least one feminine trait remaining. She admired a big strong man. Therefore she looked with eyes of favour on this big strong man, and she was pleased with his soft eyes and his gentle voice. To-day she observed that the look of doubt and trouble which he had worn when last he came was gone. He was confident, though grave.

"Louise," he said, "after what has passed you are surprised to see me. I come again because I would leave no stone unturned and no chance untried. For the sake of my poor brother, I would make one more appeal to you."

"Louise," said Antoinette, who was present, "if I were you I would listen to Jack." She said this quite kindly, and with so much condescension that Jack turned red and would have enjoyed kicking somebody. "He evidently feels sorry for the helpless position in which he has plunged this silly pair. Probably he already sees that submission, though late, will be wise. He is, I dare say,"—here she looked him up and down as one looks over a horse or a pig, and very irritating it was, but Jack kept his temper,—"He is, probably, one of those well-meaning men who try to set things right, but fail for want of intellect. He is a fine man, physically, Louise," she added, examining his proportions through her glasses with critical coldness. "He is already what the Man of the Future will become when we have trained him—strong, handsome, and of a good heart, without any pretence to Intellect. As yet we cannot expect of him what we exact of such as Valentine—obedience. Pray go on, Jack. I am already very favourably disposed towards you."

Uncle Jack bowed gravely. After all, what did it matter whether this person thought well or ill of his intellect?

"For the sake of old times," he said, "listen to me. Let the children marry their two lovers, whom you have already accepted."

"No consent of mine has been asked or given," said Mrs. Branson.

"None will be asked by them," he replied. "Yet it is important to you to give it. It is of far more importance than you think or know. I ask it for them."

"And I refuse. Is there anything more to say?"

"Indeed, my poor Jack," said Antoinette, "if this is all you have to say, you waste valuable time and irritate uselessly valuable brains. You had much better go at once, and not return until you are in a more becoming and more submissive mood."

"Before I go, remember," he said, "you have driven your late husband's daughter Christina out into the world with nothing. You have driven out Harry with nothing. When the day of reckoning comes, do not complain if you are treated as you have treated them. Once more I make a last appeal to you. Forget for a moment the craze which has beset you. Think of what you were when my brother gave this power into your hands. Think how he wished it used——"

"There were no conditions—none whatever."

"Yes: there were the unwritten conditions that the power would be used for the good of the children in the way which he and you then thought good. You allowed them to become the friends and companions of a brother and sister every way fitted for them to love. You knew that they loved each other; you tacitly gave your consent——"

"It was never asked," cried Mrs. Branson.

"You allowed them to feel that it would be granted. And now——"

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Not quite. I have to tell you that I thought this informal consent might be pleaded as an actual consent, and I went to London in order to consult a lawyer about it. I fear that it cannot."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Branson, her face clearing. "And yet you hasten on their marriage."

"Yet I hasten on the marriage. For the last time, then, I ask you, I implore you, in the name of my brother, to give your consent."

"For the last time, John Branson—No."

"Then," he sighed, "I can do no more. I will come again to-morrow, after the wedding. You will begin to repent your decision when you have heard then what I have to say, and you will go on repenting it all the days of your life."

He left her.

"Why should I repent?" Mrs. Branson asked. "To-morrow? To-morrow the estate will be mine."

"Louise," said Antoinette, "that man is not a fool. I was wrong. He has more than the ordinary brute intellect of a strong man. He *means something*. I wish I knew what it was. Are you quite sure about the estate? I am very much afraid there is a trap."

VII.

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

THE week of preparation for the wedding was a truly anxious time—all the more anxious because a brave face had to be assumed. It was a time which required much more than the amount of Faith with which one carries on the usual business of life; everybody concerned knew full well that poverty of the worst kind followed failure. Only the girls had fulness of faith: merely to think of the brave eyes of Uncle Jack was enough for them; the recollection of those eyes inspired them with confidence. They had no more doubts, no more fears, when he returned on Wednesday afternoon, bringing with him, besides his own cheerful, strong face, the other bridegroom and a waggon-load of best men, carrying gifts and precious things all alike wreathed in smiles. He whispered to the girls to have no fear; he admonished Harry to keep up his heart; he bade the Major pluck up and look cheerful.

As for that other bridegroom, Christina's swain, he bore himself with as much faith as if he had been one of the young men attached to the Sheikh of the Mountains.

"I don't know at all, Chris," he declared, "what is going to happen; but I am certain it is all right. He says so."

Very odd that even a lawyer should accept a simple assurance. It proves what Solomon forgot to say, that of all gifts and qualities which a man can have, there is none more delightful or more useful than that which makes men trust and believe in a man.

As for the Major, whatever faith he had once possessed was now oozing fast out of his boots. The day before the wedding: everything arranged, and nothing known about the future. "I trust, Mr. Branson," he said gravely, "I do trust, sir, that we are not acting rashly. Remember, it is not even now too late. The future of these children is in your hands."

"Major," said Uncle Jack, "I assure you, upon my word of honour, that I shall satisfy you to-morrow that you could have done nothing better. Trust me till to-morrow."

"It is a large order on Trust," said the Major, "but we are in for it, and cannot, I suppose, get out of it now."

After dinner, about nine o'clock, Uncle Jack made a strange request. He said that he had something to say to the two girls alone. "Would the Major leave the drawing-room to him? and would the two bridegrooms leave their *fiancées* and go away?"

He was obeyed; he was in command, therefore he was obeyed in this small thing as well as in the greater business of the wedding.

"My dears," he said, clearing his voice, which was a little husky, "I have a confession to make to you. It hasn't got anything to do with your wedding to-morrow—nothing at all. As for that, however, I do assure you most solemnly that Mrs. Branson can do

nothing to hurt you. Your fortunes shall be exactly the same as if she had no such power as she thinks she has. Your brother, Cicely—your lover, Christina—is satisfied. He does not know exactly all that he will know to-morrow, but he is satisfied."

"Indeed, indeed, Uncle Jack," they protested, "we have always believed most firmly in your ability and courage."

"Thank you," he said simply. "And for my own part, I must say that I shall never forget, so long as I live, the pretty sweet creatures who welcomed me home to my native town. Christina, my dear," he took a hand of each—"Cicely, my child, I shall always remember those two faces looking in so much wonder and amazement when I told you who I was. Cicely, you remember what you told me—how whole lakhs of rupees would be wanted? Mercenary maid!" He kissed the fingers of each in succession. "You assumed, when I dropped into your midst, that I had come back with my pockets full, rich with the spoils of thirty years. You did not ask me how I became so rich, whether in Australia, or America, or India."

"What did it matter?" said Cicely. "Oh! I talked nonsense about rupees. It was you we welcomed back, and not your rupees, although we did not know it then."

"I am glad, now, that no one, not even the Major, asked me about my fortune, and how and where it was made. You all supposed, without my telling you, that it was made. My dears, if things had been different; if you had all been sailing with fair wind aft, I should have let you know the truth at once."

"What truth, uncle?" asked Christina. "But, indeed, we do not want to ask questions of you. We do not doubt you in the least."

"That you believed me rich, helped, in the beginning, to give you confidence. It pleased me that I could be of some use to you; therefore I allowed you to believe it. My dear children, I am not rich at all—I am almost a pauper. I have nothing. As for your lakhs of rupees, Cicely, I have been in Australia, not in India. They have golden sovereigns there, not rupees. And of their golden sovereigns I have saved none—not any. I am as poor as when I started, thirty years ago. Nay, I am poorer; because, then, I had youth on my side. And that has gone. I am poor indeed, because then I had hope; and that, too, has gone."

"Oh! poor Uncle Jack!" Christina threw her arms round his neck and kissed him again.

"Poor dear Uncle Jack!" Cicely tenderly laid her cheek upon his great rough hand.

"I am worth nothing but the clothes I stand in, and the money which is to pay my passage back."

"Back? Oh! uncle, you are not going back?"

"Why, you don't suppose that I came home to be a burden on you, and to live upon my nephews and nieces, do you, children? Now, don't interrupt, and I will tell you all about it. There are

some chums in Australia who get on, and some who don't. Bless you, it is just the same as at home. Your brother, Cicely, my dear, would get on anywhere. A man like that is born to conquer the world. Yours, Chris, nowhere. Not but what he is a splendid fellow, Cicely, this lover of yours, full of pluck, dexterity, and strength; believe me, we are proud of him. I, too, am one of the sort who don't get on. I tried—in fact, I tried everything, and I have been everywhere; there is hardly a thing a man can do to earn an honest penny that I have not done. For twenty years and more I worked at such things as a decent English mechanic scorns, happy to get the work to do. Don't pity me, my dears. There are plenty like me abroad, gentlemen born and educated, who somehow have made a mess of life and failed. You can't walk along the streets of Melbourne without meeting a dozen like me. We swarm—the men who can't pass the exams., and the men who have got into debt, and the rest of it. We are everywhere; you might make a dozen rattling good regiments out of the gentlemen and the younger sons who are knocking about Australia and the Pacific. Why, the other day they had a dinner for public schoolmen only, at Levuka, and a couple of hundred sat down—fancy a couple of hundred in Fiji alone—most of them in their rags, poor beggars! For twenty years and more I wandered about, leading the vagabond life which never ends in anything. When I got work I did it; when I got no work I somehow did without it. Never without tobacco for a pipe, and very seldom beyond the reach of a dinner. Can you wonder that men who roam about the world like this do not often write to their old friends?"

"Poor Uncle Jack!" said the girls.

"At last I remembered the one talent which I possessed. Strange that I should have neglected it so long!"

"What was that?"

"You do not know, I suppose, why I left home. Of course you do not. Your father even never knew, I believe. I think," he went on slowly, "I think there was too much strictness in my up-bringing. It is not so very uncommon a thing for a lad to owe a hundred or so in his third year at Cambridge; I don't think so much need have been made of that offence; and it is not very uncommon for a young man to fall in love—it was the Curate's daughter—and I hear she has long since married, and is now the wife of an Archdeacon; but the crowning offence was that I once played in the Richmond Theatre. And my father destined me for the Church! I acted in a theatre! All these things together drove him to despair. He gave me fifty pounds, and bade me go seek my fortune out of the country; if I wanted more help I was to ask him for it, and he would consider. But he would not have his name disgraced at home by a profligate son—he called me a profligate son because I played Mercutio and kissed the Curate's daughter!"

"Poor Uncle Jack!" whispered the girls, with the sympathy which came of having been themselves kissed.

"I had almost forgotten that I could act, though I always went about singing. Mind you, up-country, in a lonely hut, with, perhaps, only one or two other men, a chum who can sing keeps the other fellows in heart. One day when I was about at my lowest, I had an inspiration. An inspiration must be acted upon while it is red-hot. I carried mine out at once. I sat down with some paper (which I borrowed) and a pencil; I wrote out all the songs I knew; I went to a man who keeps pianos and runs shows, and I made a proposition to him. He accepted it, and ever since that time I have been going about the country with a Variety Entertainment."

"A Variety Entertainment?"

"Yes: my man makes the engagements, hires the room, finds bills and pianos, and the rest of it, and takes half the profits. Sometimes I pick up a stray actor or actress, and we have a little acting as well as singing. Very popular I am in some districts, I assure you. At a Variety Entertainment I sing, play, and recite. And I can make up very well. Stay, I will show you one of my characters—the 'Gentleman Tramp'—and I will sing you my patter song about him."

He went into the hall, and came back in two or three minutes hastily "made up." His trousers were rolled up half-way to his knee: he had no coat, but wore one of the girl's shawls thrown picturesquely over his shoulders: he had on a slouched felt hat, and his shirt sleeves were rolled-up, showing brown arms tattooed. In his mouth was a short black pipe. They recognised at once, without being told, the Australian tramp. He limped as he walked, with a slouch in his step, and he looked before him, shading his eyes, as if looking along a hot and dusty road. Then he sat at the piano, and played a rattling, unscientific accompaniment, while he sang in a rich, clear, and flexible voice, none the worse for his fifty years:

"The ship was outward bound, when we drank a health around
('Twas the year fifty-three, or thereabout),
We were all for Melbourne Ho! where, like peas, the nuggets grow,
And my heart, though young and green, was also stout.

"I was two-and-twenty then, and like many other men
Among that gallant company afloat,
I had played in the eleven, and pulled five or six or seven
In the 'Varsity or else the College boat.

"We were rusticated, plucked, in disgrace, and debt, and chucked,
Out of patience were our friends—and unkind.
But all of us agreed, that a gentleman in need,
His fortune o'er the seas would surely find.

"So we liquored up and laughed, day by day aboard that craft,
Till we parted at the port, and went ashore ;
And since, of that brave crew, I have come across a few,
And we liquor and we talk, but laugh no more.

"For if damper and cold tea the choicest blessings be,
We are certainly above our merits blessed :
And a gentleman in need, as is readily agreed,
May very well dispense with all the rest.

"But as each man tells his tale, 'tis monotonous and stale,
As if adventure's game was quite played out ;
And every honest chum, to the same hard pan must come,
And no more luck was travelling about.

"'Tis how one in far Fiji, went beach-combing by the sea ;
One in Papua pioneered and died ;
One took coppers on a car, or mixed nobblers at a bar,
Or in country stores forgot Old Country pride.

"And how one lucky swain thought he'd just go home again,
And was welcomed with cold shoulder by his friends ;
And how one dug for gold, and, as usual, he was sold ;
And how one peddled pins and odds and ends.

"And how in coral isles one courted Fortune's smiles,
And how one in a shanty kept a school ;
North and south, and east and west, how we tried our level best,
And did no good at all, as a rule.

"And how some took to drink, and some to printer's ink,
And shepherded or cattle-drove awhile :
But never that I know—and so far as stories go—
Did one amongst us all make his pile.

"Well : 'tis better here than there, since rags *must* be our wear ;
In the bush we are equal—every man.
And we're all of us agreed, that a gentleman in need
Must earn his daily damper—as he can."

He stopped, and limped out as he had come in. When he returned he had resumed his ordinary appearance. But the girls were crying.

"Why," he said cheerfully, "you mustn't cry over a ne'er-do-weel like me. You see, I've obeyed my father ; I have disgraced the family name abroad, not at home. Nobody has had to blush because the profligate who fell in love at twenty, and played in a theatre, has all his life expiated those sins by rough and common work. If you had seen these hands of mine four years ago, they were hard and horny with rough work. Now they are smooth again—a gentleman's hands, because, with my Variety Entertainment, I have been leading a life distantly resembling a gentleman's."

"Poor Uncle Jack !" murmured the girls for the tenth time, at least.

"I began to do pretty well with my Show—even to lay up money

—a little money; and one day a yearning came over me, such as I had never felt before, to go home again, and see the old place. I could not think that my father would be living, but I thought of my brother Sam, and of the girl whom I loved, and the house you know, and all. I remembered that if I started just then there would be the sweet, soft English summer, and all the trees out and the flowers. Then I counted my money. I had just enough for my journey home—second class—and back again; and a month or so at home living moderately. I resolved that I would see you—not expecting whom I should see—make no pretence or brag about success, ask for no help, and, after a few days here, go to London, and so back to Melbourne. I have spent a little more money than I expected, and therefore—and—well, that is all, my dears. Your rich Uncle Jack, who had such lakhs of rupees, has got all his money in a little purse in his pocket. He is nothing in the world but a strolling vagabond, a tramp, a singer, a lecturer, and small actor. He makes people laugh. That is all."

"Oh! Uncle Jack," cried Cis, "he makes girls happy!" She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him, while her tears fell upon his face. "And, oh! oh! oh! we are so sorry."

"Yes, I have been able to make you happy. It seems to me wonderful that I should have been permitted—a hardened old tramp and vagabond like me—to do something for two sweet English girls. It is truly wonderful!" His voice dropped lower, and his eyes softened first, and then grew humid. "On the way out I shall think of it. Yes; all the rest of my life I shall think of it. Your voices, my dears, will be with me, and your eyes will follow me. After thirty years, it does a man good to get a little happiness. Just as one was beginning to grow a bit tired, and feel jaded, as if there wasn't much more cheerfulness left in the world, came the chance to me—the blessed chance, for which, I assure you, my dears, I am indeed grateful. Why, the memory of you two girls, and your ready welcome and love to a stranger—could I ever forget it? Yet, I have only seen you and talked with you three times, and to-morrow will make the fourth, all in a fortnight! Wonderful how soon a fortnight passes! Good-night, my dears. Remember sometimes, in your happiness, that poor old vagabond and tramp, your Uncle Jack."

VIII.

THE WEDDING PRESENT.

If these interesting orphans had been married in the sacred odour of filial obedience, and with full paternal or stepmaternal consent, the ceremony could not have aroused greater public excitement. It is inadequate to say that the sun rose dancing: that all the larks began to carol in concert from an early hour: that the rose-bushes

put on their sweetest rose-buds: that the leaves of the trees rustled their most melodious whispers: and that, to those who had ears to hear, the goddess who loves orchards, gardens, roadside limes, willows, and alders by the banks of streams, and all such sweet things as belong to cultivated nature, was singing all the morning a Wedding Hymn equal to anything penned by Elizabethan poets. As to the church itself, it was full; all the eight-and-twenty eligible young ladies, six of whom were bridesmaids, were present—a parterre of gaily-blooming flowers. As regards the late unhappy differences of opinion, they were forgotten; quite clearly, the opinions of an uncle, newly arrived from abroad, with mountains of gold and silver, must be correct; nor could anybody approve of opinions, however plausibly they might be set forth, which led to such results as the turning out of a young lady's wardrobe upon the cold flint stones. No one knew how many millions would be given to the brides and bridegrooms by their uncle, but it was quite certain—everybody knew it—that Mrs. Branson, if she intended to enforce her so-called rights, would have to do so in a Court of Law, and that Mr. John Branson was willing, if necessary, to carry the case even up to the Lords. The fact that the newly-married couples were risking their fortunes, and defying their stepmother, no doubt added to the interest with which they were regarded. We all remember how the whole population used to turn out in order to gaze upon the procession of men about to be hanged. Perhaps, also, everybody was desirous of seeing the miraculous uncle—*l'Oncle Dieu-Donné*—so wonderfully and Providentially bestowed on the orphans when their need was sorest.

I have always been of opinion that the wedding ceremonies in this country are shamefully curtailed, to the great loss and detriment of the bride. We ought to consider that the bridegroom has many opportunities of making a public appearance, and walking round, so to speak, before the eyes of man. He may go into Parliament or into the Vestry; he may join the Salvation Army, or the Advanced Radical Debating Society, or the Peckham Rye House of Commons. But the bride has but this one short show: a poor quarter of an hour in white satin and veil, and then to go in again, like a bad singer, although she has played her part with admirable presence of mind, grace, and beauty. Only a quarter of an hour! Why there are some countries, described by the learned Monsieur Picart, where they keep the wedding ceremonies going for three days, during which the bride continually sits before the assembled multitude, rejoicing all eyes by her surpassing loveliness, and eating Turkish Delight, honey, chocolate-creams, treacle, and jam without intermission.

It was all over; where there had been four were now only two; the vestry business was completed; the organ had pealed forth its Wedding March; the brides and bridegrooms and best men and

bridesmaids had all driven away—the Major, who had been ill at ease during the ceremony, in a terrible state of despondency and doubt—how could they, he asked, now that it was too late—how could they have trusted so implicitly this new-comer, this man of whom they knew nothing—this Uncle Jack?

All were gone, except Uncle Jack himself, who stood in the church porch with a stranger, a man who had been present during the ceremony, and had taken as much interest in it as a super in a tragedy, or a mute at a funeral, and, with a little bundle of papers, waited in the porch while the people thronged out.

"Now," said Uncle Jack, "we had better do what we have to do without further delay."

Mrs. Branson was so much affected by her brother-in-law's quiet confidence and his promise to return after the wedding with something—to put it mildly—not too pleasant for her, and with Antoinette's forebodings, that she fortified herself with the presence of her solicitor. He was a young man, although a solicitor, but he was ageing rapidly, which was in his favour; there is always hope for a young solicitor when he gets thin on the temples. This young gentleman brought with him a copy of Mr. Samuel Branson's will to assure himself and his client of her powers and rights. So that when Jack Branson and his companion arrived, they met a little group of three, Antoinette forming one.

"Your stepchildren," said Uncle Jack, "are married."

"Without your consent, madam," said the lady's solicitor. "By their father's will, then, the estate is your own."

"That, I suppose," observed Antoinette sharply, glancing at Jack, "cannot be disputed."

"On the contrary," said Jack.

"Quite the contrary," Jack's companion repeated.

"I thought so," Antoinette murmured. "I knew there was a trap."

"Pray, sir," said Mrs. Branson's solicitor, "if you have any objection to make, do so through me."

"I have instructed this gentleman," Jack replied; "who is a partner in the firm of Longwynd, Spinnet, and Taxum, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, to follow the usual procedure, if any should be required. I have also instructed him to make it quite clear to you, for your client, that my conditions are final."

"Your conditions?" The young solicitor drew out his copy of the will. "Your conditions, sir?"

"My conditions are that Mrs. Branson leaves this house immediately—within one hour; that she takes out of it nothing but her dresses, jewels, and personal effects. One moment, sir. You shall, I assure you, be thoroughly satisfied immediately. Such treatment as she dealt to her stepdaughter I deal to her. She must leave the house within an hour; she shall have an annuity of two hundred pounds a year. If she refuses, she shall have nothing."

"He will do it," said Antoinette. "He will certainly do it."

"What is the meaning——" Mrs. Branson began. But her jaws stuck, as the old books used to say, and she could not finish her sentence. Her cheeks were pale, and her look scared.

"And what about me, Jack?" asked Antoinette. "Am I, with my Secretary, to be thrown out of window?"

"Pray use your own convenience, Miss Baker. Under the circumstances——"

"Yes—I understand. Do you know, Jack, it has been a very fine thing for those young people that you turned up? If it had not been for you, I should most certainly have married Harry—I should have made him marry me, whether he liked it or not; but I doubt whether I should ever have made him a man after my own heart. There isn't the making of my kind of man in him. Very likely, too, the discipline would have killed him. Don't think that I should have beaten him, or deprived him of his beer, or anything; but he would have had to obey and do as I told him, and I doubt whether he would have been happy."

"What, in the name of goodness, did you want to marry him for?"

"You are a big, strong man, Jack, and, I think, with a head upon your shoulders; and can't you see that Harry is rich enough for any woman? I am not mercenary at all for myself, and I have enough to live upon; but I am zealous for the Cause. I do not want a husband, nor do I want his money; but, for the Cause, it would be better if I were married, and if I could live in a big house. Now you see. Good-bye, Jack. If you were younger and more amenable I would much rather marry you. I would indeed."

"The other one—the She-man," said Jack, "will be put out of doors or through the window immediately, neck and crop, if he ventures to come back."

"Valentine, I suppose—ye—yes. He has gone to London on an errand for me. He shall not come back here. Indeed, it would be useless. I don't think he will be so much help to us as I thought at first. What we most want is a big, strong, healthy, contented-looking man, who will also show his obedience to the Intellect of Woman. You would look the part to perfection, Jack. Look here"—she laid her hand on his arm—"if you like to think of it, though your hair is gone grey, I am ready to marry you. I am indeed. Look at me. Am I pretty enough for you? Your money will be quite as good as Harry's, and your manner is finer."

"None for me, thank you," stammered Jack in great confusion, as if he had been asked if he would take something after his walk.

Mrs. Branson all this time sat staring at this brother-in-law of hers, who thus made shipwreck of all her plans and herself as well. Somehow, she knew that the game was up. There was nothing but obedience possible for her. Her importance was gone; her career ruined; and she felt with bitterness that it no longer mattered,

as she would have no money, whether she belonged to the Cause or not.

Then Jack went away, leaving the partner in Messrs. Longywnd, Spinnet, and Taxum behind.

"The meaning," said the partner, taking the young solicitor into a window, but Mrs. Branson and Antoinette caught a word or two—"The meaning of all this is that—hum—hum—that—hum—hum——"

"Good heavens!" cried the young solicitor. "I never knew this."

"Certainly: there can be no doubt of it. And further, unless your client—hum—hum—arrears—hum—hum—hum—nothing in the world."

"God bless me! Pardon me, madam," he addressed his client, "you are quite sure that the gentleman who has just gone out is Mr. John Branson?"

"Why, of course he is," said Mrs. Branson. "There is no doubt about it. Dozens of people here have recognised him. He is very little altered, considering."

"Then, in fact, it is very distressing, very; but, my dear madam, I regret to inform you that everything you have in the world probably belongs to him, because, you see——"

"I suspected it all the time," said Antoinette. "What a pity, what a thousand pities, that he did not come home a few weeks earlier! We could have caught him for the Cause. I would have married him, and—oh! *what* a mess you've made of it, Louise! To be sure, you did not show the spirit of obedience I expected in you; you were not worthy of this great fortune; and perhaps things are as well as they have turned out."

The breakfast was over, and the carriage waiting for the two couples. The brides were gone, in fact, to change their dresses. Meantime, the people gathered about the porch with rice to throw. They waited a most unreasonable time. The reason was this.

Uncle Jack was not in the porch with the rest. He was in the Major's study, and the brides were with him.

"My dears," he said, "I have not given you my wedding present. It is here." He handed Cicely a letter in a blue envelope. "Give that to your husband;" and to Chris another. "Keep that yourself, my dear, and open it in the train. You see, I went up to London looking for one thing, and I found another. What I found was that all my brother's estate was mine; absolutely and without room for dispute, mine."

"Yours? Oh, Uncle Jack! yet you told us last night that you had nothing at all!"

"I have nothing at all. I am a Tramp and a Vagabond still. I said that the property was mine; but it is mine no longer. It was left to me by my father, to devolve upon my brother if I should be dead. They took it for granted that I was dead, and he enjoyed

the income during his lifetime. None of you—not even your stepmother or any of her advisers—seem to have known that if I came home it would all be mine. Do you understand now?"

"Yes—but—but——"

"Now you see why I was late at the breakfast. I wanted first to turn out your stepmother. This I have done. Next, as regards yourselves. Could you think, Christina and Cicely, that your uncle would come all the way from Australia to be made much of by you two girls, and then to take away your fortunes? A Gentleman Tramp is not necessarily a Rogue. Cicely, my dear, that paper in your hand tells your husband that the estates are his own again. They have only gone through my hands in order to get rid of his stepmother for him. Christina, my dear, that letter in your hand assures you of your fortune, free as when your father thought it was his own to leave you. Children, good and kind, this is my wedding present. Kiss me. Now go to your husbands, who must not be kept waiting. Yes, yes, my dears—perhaps—perhaps—some day. Give me one more kiss."

It was astonishing, everybody said, that the brides, who had both behaved so admirably and kept up so well, came out of the house with eyes full of tears, and on getting into the carriages began, each in her own, to cry and to sob. What did they cry for?

When the Major went to look for Uncle Jack he was gone. And he has never come back since. Where he has gone to, what he is doing—unless he is carrying on his Variety Entertainment in Australia—no one knows. But they all live in hopes that some day he will return to see the girls again.

JULIA.

I.

"THERE's the *Family Treasure*, Julia. Now don't forget the *Family Treasure*, whatever you do. It's three pound four and eight. And owing three months."

"Three four eight," Julia repeated, mechanically making a note of the amount with a stump of a pencil. "He said he'd pay this morning."

"See that he does then. The *Treasure's* a slippery chap. Lord! the world's full of slippery chaps. We've all got to be slippery, whether we like it or not, we have, because we're poor. Nobody ought to be poor."

The speaker was an old man of seventy or more, perched upon a high stool; a dried-up old man, with short and spiky white hair, and a face covered with lines, wrinkles, and crow's feet. His chin was square, and he spoke with the sharp impatience which belongs to masterful men. In fact, he was a pugnacious man, and a stickler for rights: one of those men who can kick. The fighting and kicking man is invaluable when he has been taught to use his gifts aright. Too often, however, he kicks the wrong persons and fights on the wrong side. This man was so pugnacious that he certainly ought to have become a rich and successful man. But he was neither rich nor successful, because I suppose he had never found himself in the right groove. The office in which he was at work belonged to his workshop, and that was in the City Road, on the north or sunny side of that noble thoroughfare, and very near where it bends southward. The office was only a small slip of a place, eight feet broad and fifteen feet long; there was a small fireplace at one end and a safe at the other; there was also in it a table with a wooden chair; there was a high desk and a stool, and beside the fireplace there was a cupboard. This was the living or keeping room of Mr. Bradberry, as well as his office, and above it was his bedroom, because he was not ashamed to live in his place

of business, and indeed could not afford to live elsewhere. On entering the place for the first time, one observed a curiously sour smell, one of those smells which seem to the outsider as if the longer one remains among them, the more unpleasant do they become; a smell which would very soon entirely rout a whole army and put them to flight; a smell to which no one could ever become accustomed; in that respect a smell like the smell of a poulterer's shop, or the smell of new furniture, or that of vinegar. To those, however, familiar with the industries of the country, the smell meant paste, and the paste meant cases, and the cases meant books, and the books meant bookbinding. In fact, this was the workshop or studio of a bookbinder, one of the humblest followers of that craft and mystery; one whose workmen and workgirls were few, and whose operations were conducted with a view to cheapness much more than to artistic finish. Mr. Bradberry, in fact, knew nothing of the history and splendours of his own craft, had never heard of the great masters, even of Grolier de Servier; knew nothing at all, even by hearsay, of blazons, mottoes, and geometrical patterns, and was quite content to bind everything that came to him in stout cloth at ninepence, in half-leather at one and six, and in whole leather, with gilt extra, at three and six: and hoped for little more good fortune than to get enough work to keep his people employed, and to pay his way with regularity.

"And that, Julia," he said, "no man can do who don't get paid himself. Stick it into them, therefore. You're a deal too mild. Tell 'em I'll County Court 'em, every one."

"Have I got all?" Julia interrupted him, without paying the least heed to this burst of wrath, which happened regularly on Saturday morning when she went forth to collect for her employer.

"Yes, you've got 'em all." The old man slipped off his stool, and you then perceived that he was quite a little old man, and wondered how he could impress people, as he did, with the sense of importance. "You've got 'em all; and presently you'll come back with about a quarter of what you ought to have, and a cartload of excuses. They can't pay, and then they tell lies. Nobody ought to be poor. I'll go bankrupt and shut up the shop, I will. I'll go to New Zealand. You shall go with me if you like, and your grandmother shall go to the House. There, Julia, you've got 'em all. Well? What are you waiting for?"

The words were harsh, but the manner was not. Julia nodded, and began to put up her pencil and her note-book. Then suddenly her face turned white, and her head began to swim, and things got dark; and Julia would have fallen, but the old man caught her and placed her in his armchair. It was only a brief fainting-fit and over in a moment. She recovered, and sat up, looking rather white and dazed.

"What's the matter with the girl?" the old man cried. "Are you better now, Julia?"

"Oh yes," she said, looking about her. "It was nothing. I am well enough now. Perhaps the room was hot."

"Nothing!" he repeated with scorn. "Hot room! Don't tell lies, you girl! Your beast of a grandfather was drunk again last night, and there's no money this morning, and no breakfast."

Julia cast down her eyes. The charge was not to be denied. Indeed, this tendency of her grandparent to drink up and devour the family revenues was as well known as if he had been Louis Quatorze.

"And there was no supper last night when you came home from the theatre." He banged the table with his fist. "No supper, and no breakfast: and then you waste my precious time with your fainting-fits."

Julia replied not, but sat guiltily hanging her head.

"You move out of that chair if you dare, till I come back!"

Mr. Bradberry seized his hat and disappeared. Presently he returned, followed by a boy bearing a tray, on which was a cup of cocoa steaming hot, and a roll of bread and a pat of butter.

"You will eat this—every bit of it, you will," said Mr. Bradberry, with terrifying fierceness, "before you go! Mind you, Julia, don't think I'm going to pay for it. Not a bit. It shall be taken out of your wages. Every penny. And if you don't take care, I'll make you eat a mutton-chop out of your wages too, every morning, when you come, before you do a stroke, I will! By the Lord, I will! Tell your grandmother."

He stopped because he choked. Otherwise he would have said a good deal.

Julia made no reply. If you are horribly hungry—faint with hunger, and have had nothing to eat from yesterday's five o'clock cup of tea and slice of bread and butter, you do not want any second bidding to swallow a cup of cocoa and a roll. Therefore she obediently drank up all the cocoa, which might have been stronger, but was hot and sweet; and made short work of the roll and the pat of butter, which was beautiful, though very likely it was only butterine and made out of pure beef fat. But it went very well with the roll, and she thought it was butter.

"If your grandfather and your grandmother was took," Mr. Bradberry went on, in a kinder voice, "or if you'd let 'em go into the House at once, I'd double your wages, Julia, I would indeed. You're worth more than eighteen shillings a week to me, a great deal more. What I said about you bringing of 'em up to the mark was nonsense, Julia. You persuade 'em out of their money with your pretty talk much better than any clerk-fellow could. But I shan't raise your wages, for all that, d'ye hear? I shall lower 'em. Go and tell your miserable old grandfather that I shall cut you down. Where's your spirit? What do you do it for? Why don't you take and keep your money? Very well, I shall cut you down five shillings a week, and you shall have a cup of cocoa for breakfast

and a mutton-chop for dinner every day out of the balance. Go and tell 'em that. Yah!"

Julia answered none of these questions. But being greatly strengthened and refreshed with the cocoa and the roll, she got up and said "Thank you," and went away with her pocket-book and her stump of pencil.

II.

The girl was simply, but not shabbily, dressed in a black cloth jacket, and a black stuff frock; her hat was ornamented with a red feather, and she wore a pair of Swedish gloves, once a light drab, but now gone brown, or even black, in the fingers. If you were to meet Julia in the street you would probably pass her by without notice; quite an insignificant girl: a girl of whom there are hundreds and thousands in London. Yet those observant persons who sat opposite her when she went on her errands by omnibus or Metropolitan Railway, became presently aware that this was a girl who had points. For instance, she had large and limpid eyes of deep blue, which immediately attracted the attention of anyone who had eyes of his own; they were the kind of eyes which seem to absorb the light and let it stay there; they were "as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters;" or the kind of eyes which seem to be always full of tenderness, and thoughts too deep for human utterance. Her hair was brown and plentiful; her nose was perhaps a little too short, and her mouth a little too large—but in a work-girl you do not expect everything, and it really was a face full of possibilities. She was of a fair height, but not tall, and much too thin; she was also rather round-shouldered and flat-chested. If one sits in a third-class carriage opposite such a girl, one presently —unless one is reading the paper, or happens to be a stock or a stone —falls a-thinking how it would be if one were to take her away and place her where she could breathe pure air, with people who would endeavour to put great thoughts into her mind, suffer her to do no work but what she pleased, give her plenty of good food, pretty dresses, and sweet companionship, with sympathy, confidence, and love. Then certainly would the round shoulders straighten themselves, the flat chest fill out with womanly beauty, the lines in her forehead vanish, the cheek grow plump and rosy, and her face become bright with smiles and sunshine, as was intended at the outset. There is a certain admirable school to which all really gracious ladies belong: this school thinks that every person it knows is possessed of as pure and perfect a soul as was originally planned for them, and so they are to be treated and trusted accordingly. Very often they get horribly cheated, but that matters little. Now it helps these good people wonderfully in the estimate which they make

of their friends if they can discover for themselves the true face—the model—behind the sorry failure which a narrow and pinching life too often makes of it. Nobody who has not tried it can imagine how interesting a person becomes when you have once discovered what a wonderfully beautiful face ought to belong to that person. Up to a certain time of life the real face is easily discerned, and without much difficulty recoverable. Let us take a great number of these failures, while they are yet young, and bring them back to themselves.

As for Julia, it was easy to see what her face should have been, because at nineteen it is almost impossible to have spoiled the original. Besides, Julia had as yet done nothing at all to disfigure herself, except so far as ignorance, hard work, and lack of any pleasure disfigure a girl. They do undoubtedly make for disfigurement, as may be seen any Saturday afternoon in the London streets. She did not, for instance, walk about these streets three abreast talking loudly and laughing noisily and on small provocation, as many maidens use: she "kept company," good or bad, with no man: she went home every evening after her work was over with regularity, and she sallied forth every morning before work was begun with punctuality. She lived with her grandparents, who had two rooms on a first floor in Brunswick Place, which leads out from the City Road to Charles Square, the favourite home and retreat of Hoxton solicitors, who are the cream of the profession; and to Hoxton Square; and to the theatre which is known in the neighbourhood as the Britannieroxton. The old man had been all his life employed at a certain publisher's in Paternoster Row, and he was still retained at a small wage, though well-nigh past his work, to pack up parcels, which he did with so much zeal and enthusiasm, and so virtuous and benevolent a countenance, that many people believed he must have a share in the profits. The old lady had been for many years a dresser at the Royal Grecian, and still had the run of the house, and was enthusiastic for the drama, especially that part of it which concerns the ladies' frocks. Both the old people, moreover, were lovers of those emotions which can be procured by strong drink and plenty of it. They got it, as they got their rent, their clothes, and most of their food, out of Julia's wages.

The girl was, not to disguise the truth, a gutter girl, a child of the streets. As for her mother, she knew only, because her grandmother derived satisfaction from the thought, that she was buried with a wedding-ring, and as for her father, as she was bidden not to ask, it is as well for us not to inquire. Perhaps he deserted his wife, which frequently happens in certain circles; perhaps he "did something," which also often happens. Whatever his history, he contributed nothing to the maintenance of the child, who was from the first given to understand that she was indebted to her grandmother beyond any power of repayment, but that she

would be obliged in after life to give back some of the dreadful expenditure lavished upon her for her early "keep" out of her own earnings.

The Board School taught her to read, spell, and cipher; her playgrounds were about the shabby and broken railings of Charles Square, in whose enclosure are real shrubs and real grass; and the pavements of Tabernacle Walk, and Pitfield Street, where are the great Haberdashers' schools, and even the boundless City Road itself; her earliest views concerning Heaven, of which she really did acquire some vague information, were of a place quite far off, the way to which was at present unknown to her, where there would be no old grandmother to beat and nag at her, and an endless supply of eel-pie, mutton-pie, and cranberry pie; her companions were naturally girls like herself: and the greatest pleasure attainable by the children was to dance on the pavement to the music of a barrel-organ—everybody ought always to give sixpence to an organ-grinder, whenever one is observed to be benevolently grinding for the penniless little ones to dance. As for religion, morals, principles, rules of life, conduct—Julia, like the others, had, for the most part, to pick them up for herself. Considering that this was Julia's birth, and this her education, I can only explain her love of things quiet, decorous, and well-ordered by supposing that she was naturally driven to like the exact opposite of the things which pleased her grandmother. If this is not considered sufficient to account for the fact, one may fall back on the general truth, that some girls, whether they be princesses or gutter children, are born with a natural and instinctive love for good behaviour and all that belongs thereto. The Lord, said some divine—probably Augustine, who seems to have said almost all the really human things—made women pure and men strong. The monks, in order to find an excuse for their monkeries, reversed the maxim.

She was reckoned an extremely fortunate girl, and drew wages which made other girls gasp and pant and hold their breath. Family connection and private interest, as is always the way, brought her this good fortune. For her grandmother took her at a very tender age to the Grecian, where she appeared on the stage whenever a child, boy or girl, was wanted in the melodrama. At Christmas a good many children are taken on for the pantomime, and Julia always made one. When she grew taller, she was a village maiden, or one of the crowd, or part of a procession, or she held the princess's train, or in fact, she was anybody required to fill up the stage and make a group. As she was the prettiest of all the girls, and "made up" better than any of them, she was soon placed in the front, with orders to turn her big eyes upon the sympathetic pit, and smile sweetly. She did this, driving the shop boys to despair, and drawing all hearts to herself for fifteen shillings a week. Yet if Julia ever tried to understand anything at all in the world, which I very much doubt, it was to ask why people came to the theatre—all the

tricks of which she knew and despised—unless it was to see the heroine's dresses.

This was her evening's occupation. All the day long she kept the accounts of a book-binder. Observe again the value of family connection. Her grandfather it was who saw in the bookbinding trade a chance for the girl, and therefore got her taken by Mr. Bradberry, of the City Road, as a folder. She might have learned in time to fold very neatly, and might even have risen to be a sewer of sheets, but, by some lucky accident, her employer discovered in her a previously hidden and very remarkable capacity for keeping accounts. Julia possessed a clear head and an accurate power of addition. Therefore, she ceased to sit in a row and fold, and was promoted from the workshop to the office, and was consequently separated from the other girls. She drew from the theatrical treasury fifteen shillings a week, and Mr. Bradberry paid her eighteen, so that this fortunate girl was actually earning thirty-three shillings a week, on which, with the ten shillings which the old man got for his packing, her grandparents did remarkably well, and enjoyed most of the blessings of civilization, including gin.

It can hardly be said that in those days Julia could be called happy, because happiness is an active condition of brain, and cannot exist without something to feed upon in the shape of a memory or an expectation. Certainly, on the other hand, she was not miserable, because misery also requires a memory or a dread. If, like Robinson Crusoe, she had to consider the questions for or against, she might have set down, on the one hand, that she made a really great income; on the other, that her grandmother took it all: on the one hand, that she had steady work: on the other, that she had too much of it: on the one hand, that she had no friends and no amusements; on the other, that she knew the "ropes" of one form of amusement at least, and wanted no more of it: on the one hand, that she was young: on the other, that young people ought to have some time in the day, if it be only an hour in the evening, for the enjoyment of their youth. The human soul, say the phrase-mongers, is capable of infinite happiness. Let us rather read it that the human soul is capable of enjoying whatever it knows how to desire. Julia desired nothing because as yet she knew nothing. She was too young to feel the curse of labour. She liked the book-keeping work because her employer was kind to her. She went to the theatre without asking herself whether she liked it or not, because she had always gone there. And what she thought about all day I know not, nor can I understand, seeing that she consorted not with other girls, who talk, and therefore I suppose, think, all day long without stopping; was at work from nine in the morning till nearly twelve at night; never read anything, and never talked with anybody except Mr. Bradberry, who came in and out of his office, and grumbled about his debts and the hardness of the times. But she was used to him, and besides, he was kind to her in his way.

On Sundays some girls go for a walk, some go to church, some have lovers who come a-courting. Julia, for her part, had fallen into the custom of spending the Sunday morning at the office, pretending to make up arrears of books with Mr. Bradberry, but really in order that he might have a listener while he discoursed upon the iniquity of poverty. Julia listened solemnly, but did not understand one word. Then, on Sunday afternoon, while the old people took a nap, she arranged her wardrobe. It is not for nothing that a girl has a grandmother who has been a dresser at the theatre. Most girls of Julia's level know no more how to use a needle than a graving tool, which is the reason why they always go draggle-tailed. Julia could sew. Therefore, though she might dress simply, she never looked shabby. And Sunday evening was the pleasantest evening in the whole week, because she sat in a chair and did nothing, and the old folks went to their room at nine o'clock, and she could go to bed three hours before her usual time, the noise of the feet in the street and the singing of disorderly people and the roll of the omnibuses in the City Road serving for her lullaby.

If she looked or hoped for any change in her lot, it would have been, I think, for nothing more than that her grandmother would always keep her temper, and that she herself could shake off the troublesome cough which came to her at the beginning of winter and stayed with her till the middle of summer.

But she was nineteen years of age, and there was bound to come, some time or other, a change to this monotonous existence. There are so many things, you see, which young people must desire as soon as they get to know of them. Sooner or later, they are bound to learn some of them ; and it is proper and fitting for youth to be always desiring ; and Nature abhors that condition of mind in which nothing is desired. It is, in fact, the moral vacuum.

III.

Thus passed the days, each like unto each, save that some were colder and some warmer, and on some days there was grey cloud, and on some there was sunshine on the flags ; not one among them all leaving a mark. But, since where there is life there is movement, and nothing stands still, the girl was learning to know that the old people drank a great deal more than was good for them, and that they were growing shaky in the morning, and that they were getting to drink more every week, and that all her money ought not to be demanded of her, in strict justice, for the purpose of buying gin, even though her grandmother had brought her up : perhaps she felt, too, that the bookbinder's office was a more pleasant place than her own home, and that her testy employer was

a more agreeable companion than her grandfather. But no thought, as yet, or desire of change, or expectation that her life could be anything but that of Cato's Perfect Slave, who was always asleep when he was not at work, and always at work when he was not asleep.

But there came a change, as there always does to things mundane. The Roman slave got his when he fell ill, and was carried out, by a grateful master's orders, into the open air to die on a rock. Julia got hers by a method which promised at first much more pleasant things.

It was in the last week of May. A melodrama was going on in which she was not required after the end of the fourth act and fifteenth tableau, that, namely, in which the marriage of the good young miller and the virtuous dairy-maid, just about to be accomplished, after unheard-of difficulties, is interrupted at the very doors of the church by the arrival of the wicked young lord with the press-gang, and the bridegroom is torn from the arms of his bride amid the shrieks of the village maidens. Julia was a village maiden, and while she held up her arms in the conventional attitude to express terror, indignation, and pity, she turned her great eyes as usual to the pit and smiled sweetly upon the rows of white and eager faces. When the curtain fell, she was free, and hurried away to resume her walking dress.

It was half-past ten, the evening air was cool and fresh after the hot breath of the gas. Julia came out of the theatre and passed through the gardens where a band was playing, and the people were dancing on the platform. There is now no place at all, actually no place, in the whole of this great city of four millions, where the people are allowed to dance—think upon it!—but two years ago there was this poor little City Road Ranelagh still surviving, with its gallery and its lights and its platform and its band. Julia stopped and looked at the scene as she passed through: it had no attractions at all for her: after standing on the stage close to the big drum she had no wish for any more music; and as for dancing, which she had once endeavoured to learn for stage purposes, it was associated in her mind with the horrible temper of the dancing-master. Nor was she attracted by the appearance of the company, consisting chiefly of rather noisy boys of the smaller shop kind and workgirls. The boys mostly kept together and laughed among each other, while the girls also kept together and laughed among each other too, as if to demonstrate their independence. A good many of the girls danced together; now and then one of the boys would step out and beckon with his finger to the bevy of girls, and say, "'Ere," when one of them would step out, and they danced with each other. Well: they enjoyed the dancing after their own way: now they are not allowed to dance at all; but are left to themselves, and are therefore making up revolutionary clubs, and want to nationalize the land—as if that will

make them any the happier. When they come to divide private capital as well as land, the worthy Middlesex magistrates, who all have capital though very few have land, will perhaps wish that they had encouraged a taste for more innocent amusements while it was yet time.

Julia, however, did not dance: and she knew none of the company, and so slipped through them and passed out into Shepherdess Walk, and into the City Road. Here she hesitated a moment. She was tired and would have liked to go to bed; but it was Saturday night, and the old people were not yet, she very well knew, "ripe" for bed. So she crossed the road, because the south side is quieter, and turned to the right, and thought, as it was a fine night and a bright moon, that she would walk for half an hour.

When she came out of the gardens a young man followed her; when she turned her face west and walked towards Islington, he followed too, keeping a few yards behind her. She, meantime, was too much accustomed to the tread of multitudinous feet to take heed of following steps. The soft air of spring and the bright moonlight soothed her after the theatre, and the roar of the audience, and the blare of the band. Why, she thought, do people want so much noise? And why should they all shout and applaud when the heroine is thrown into the river by the villain, and rescued all dripping by her dauntless lover? The sillies! They must know it is all sham.

Three times that young man who followed her walked quickly after the girl, as if with intent to speak to her; three times his courage failed him, because he was a shy young man; at the fourth attempt he grew desperate, and laid his hand, with City Road politeness, on the girl's shoulder, saying, in a hoarse and husky whisper, "May I speak with you for a moment?"

"You'd best let me go," she replied quickly, looking round to see if assistance was near. "You'd best let me go. I don't speak to strangers."

"Only for a moment," he said. "Only for a moment. Please don't send me away. I don't mean any harm. I don't want to be rude." She wavered. "I want to tell you"—here he gasped and choked—"that I've been to the Grecian every night for three weeks and more, on purpose to see you on the stage; and for a fortnight I've followed you home every night."

"What did you want to follow me home for?" she asked, wondering what possessed the man. She had been followed before, but not every evening for a fortnight. And she had been spoken to, but not in so polite a manner.

"Because I love you," he replied. "Oh! I've seen lots of girls on the stage, but not one half so beautiful as you, nor with such lovely eyes."

Julia knew that she had good eyes, and thought of them with gratitude because they procured her a front place on the stage,

and a certain consideration at the treasury on a Saturday. They had their money value.

"As for insulting you," the young fellow went on, clenching his fist, "I'd like to see the man who'd dare to try it on when I was about. Look here—tell me your name first."

"My name is Julia."

"Julia—ah!" he gasped again, as if the name fitted with the beauty of its owner. "Julia! I ought to have guessed it. Will you meet me to-morrow afternoon? Will you go for a walk with me?"

She hesitated. It was the first time that such an invitation had been offered her.

"Am I too late?" he asked. "But I've never seen any other fellow with you. Do you keep company with some one else?"

"No," she replied: "it isn't that. I've never kept company with anyone."

"Do you think I'm not respectable? Why, I'm in charge of the the bookstall at Hoxton Junction, to sell the books and papers. They give me thirty shillings a week already. You can come and see me there. Come on Monday. I don't want to hide anything from you: if you'll only keep company with me, I'll tell you all about myself."

"I can't come on Monday," she replied, touched by this proof of confidence. "I work all day at Mr. Bradberry's, the bookbinder, keeping his books for him. In the evening I go to the theatre."

"Then will you meet me to-morrow?"

He took her hand. She trembled a little, and looked at him doubtfully. He was a very good-looking young fellow, with fair hair and pink-and-white complexion, rather tall, and dressed with as much regard to fashion as the money would allow. His eyes looked into hers with an expression which she knew not, but it made her heart leap up strangely.

"Meet me here at three," he went on. "I always go to chapel in the morning with mother, who is particular and serious. We will go—we will go——" He began to consider how, with due regard to the expense, he could make an attractive programme. "We will go by the King's Cross tram to Hampstead, and have tea at North End, and we'll walk down Fortune Lane or on the Heath, if you like that better, after tea. If it's a fine day it will be beautiful. Do you like Hampstead?"

"I have never been there," she said. "I have never been anywhere. I have got no friends at all except grandmother and grandfather and Mr. Bradberry." Her eyes filled with tears, partly because she now perceived for the first time how lonely and friendless a girl she was, and partly because it was such a beautiful thing to have anyone caring to know her.

"Haven't you got friends at the theatre among the other girls?"

She shook her head.

"You are too beautiful for them," he said. "Of course you can't make friends with them. Most of them are a horrid ugly lot. And haven't you any friends in the bookbinding?"

"No. I keep my own hours, so I see none of the girls. I used to know a lot of girls when I went to school, but I don't know where they are now; girls like us get scattered, so I've nobody."

"And haven't you got father and mother?"

"No; they are both dead; and I am told not to ask any questions about them: and, oh! you are respectable, and—would your mother like it?"

She meant would his mother like him, so handsome and well-dressed a lad, to keep company with a girl so humble as herself? He thought she meant that perhaps his mother wouldn't like her stage business.

"Mother wouldn't mind the book-keeping. Come, Julia, let us two be friends. My name is James Atherston. Call me Jem, and I will call you Julia. Will you promise for to-morrow? Give me your hand and——" He not only took her hand but he kissed her forehead. "Oh! Julia, if you knew how I love you! Why, I fell in love with you the first time I saw you on the stage—the very first time! Oh! Julia, we shall be so happy!"

In this way Julia's happiness began for her: coming upon her swiftly and unexpectedly, as all great and good things come. When her lover left her at her own door, she went in feeling conscious all over that she had been kissed, that her hand had been pressed, that she had been called beautiful, and that a young man—a lovely young man, handsome and well set up, well dressed, a young man to be proud of—had said he loved her. Never before had anyone kissed her in all her life, nor had anyone caressed her, nor had anyone said a word of love or tenderness to her. Oh! girls of the better sort, you receive the love and endearments that are lavished on you by those who love you without much heed, regarding them, as in some sort, your due. So they are; I deny it not: but think how it would have been for you if you had had none!

Her grandmother would certainly have noticed the change in the girl when she came home, the light in her eye, the flush on her cheek, the carriage of her head, the elasticity of her step—for this was a suspicious grandmother, and she went daily in dread of this very thing, namely, a lover and a wedding, which might lead to the loss of her Julia and the extinction of her income—but for the circumstance that she was now in the last stage but one of intoxication, that is to say, she was sitting bolt upright with a vacuous smile upon her face: a few moments more and another drop of gin and water, and she would be ready to be led away. The old man might also have noticed his granddaughter's unusual appearance, but that he too was in the last stage but one. He held an empty pipe in his hand, and, with the tears of pity and sympathy running down his face, he was singing, "Father, dear father, come home to your

child." So that neither of them took the least notice of the girl, who, for the first time in her life, regarded her guardians with shame, because—what—oh! what would Jem think of her if he were to see them in this condition? She had often before seen them in the same condition, with disgust and a helpless bitterness, but now she was ashamed of them. Jem, it was quite certain from the very beginning, must not be allowed to spend an evening with her grandfather.

Presently, however, Julia was left alone. She pulled down her bed, which was one of the old-fashioned kind made up to look like a cabinet or wardrobe; but she was not sleepy. She wrapped her head in her shawl, and sat at the open window looking up at the moonlit sky and thinking of what had happened. So she remained, her chin in her hand, long after midnight, till the hurrying feet outside had nearly all gone off to bed, and Brunswick Place, never a noisy street, was perfectly quiet. Noisy or quiet, it mattered not. Her brain was full of the young man and his words. Foolish brain! He called her beautiful; he said he loved her. He wanted to keep company with her; he had been following her for a fortnight; he called her beautiful; he had been to the theatre every night for three weeks; he said he loved her; he had pressed her hand; he must be good as well as handsome, for he told her at once what he was and where he worked; he said he loved her; and so on over and over again.

At last, with a sigh, she shut the window and drew down the blind, and went to bed. Simple Julia! All this agitation because a young fellow was in love with her! Why, at the West-end theatres—but then Julia was only at the Royal Grecian.

IV.

THEN there began a sweet and pretty idyl, though the shepherd was but a bookstall clerk and the nymph only a theatre person. On the one side, a boy, full of imagination, who had read a good many of the books he sold, and who saw, behind those large and lustrous eyes, which had so ravished his heart, a whole heaven of beautiful thoughts. This belief gave him an unbounded respect for his mistress. What does it matter—the rank and social position of a girl—if with her eyes or her face she can inspire her lover with this belief? On the other hand, a girl who, for her part, saw that her lover was well-mannered, handsome and brave; she had always thought so little of herself that this strange thing, his love, made her wonder and feel afraid. How should he love so poor a creature as herself? How should she fix his love so that he should never again want to look upon the face of another woman?

Of course her first instinct in this new posture of affairs was to

make herself as beautiful as the day, if that were possible. Therefore, at every opportunity she added something to her little fineries; and, because happiness always shows itself by external signs, she began to hold up her head, to walk with elastic step; her cough left her, her cheek filled out, her chest expanded, she became daily more beautiful—her eyes smiled still upon the enraptured pit, but they smiled also upon the whole world.

"Julia," said her grandmother, with sinking heart, because she quickly found out how the girl spent her Sundays. "Julia, mind—there's young men and young men. Some of 'em want nothing but to live upon your wages. Take care. I believe I *have* heard things about him—but never mind. Take care, my gell. Keepin' company is one thing. A gell can't keep company too long. Remember that. Marryin's another. A gell can't put off marryin' too long. You take care, and be guided by your old grandmother. And, oh! Julia, don't let him have none of your money!"

Julia laughed. Her Jem would not want to take her money, he was only too ready to spend his own. But she did a thing which filled the old lady with terror; one day she dared to keep all her money, and only allowed her grandmother so much out of it as would pay the rent and the food. Why, where was the money for drink to come from in future? The old people sat and looked at each other, considering the question in dismay. The old woman went to the theatre and asked for her granddaughter's money to be paid weekly to herself. They laughed at her. She went to Mr. Bradberry with a similar request, and came away broken in spirit and wounded in her feelings.

Now, too, though Julia spent her Sunday mornings as before, with Mr. Bradberry, she no longer went through the books with him. She brought her work and thread, and made pretty things for herself while he smoked his pipe and talked about the wickedness of existing institutions, especially of all kings, queens, princes, priests, and ministers of the gospel, who between them keep people poor. Julia listened and heard nothing, her heart being far away. Besides, as she knew none of these people, what did it matter to her how wicked they chose to be? Anybody, she ignorantly thought, may be as wicked as he pleases. It is mere matter of personal taste.

"You don't mind what I say, Julia," he grumbled. "That's the way with a girl. Give her a lover and she's spoiled. Can't think about anything else."

Sometimes, but not often, because his mother did not like him to come home late, Jem met her as she came out of the theatre, and walked home with her; but the regular day was Sunday, when she put on her best things and met him at three o'clock, on the south side of the City Road, just where the bridge goes over the canal. When she saw him striding along the pavement to meet her, a flower in his button-hole, so gallant, so full of love, her heart beat fast and her cheek flushed, and there was not one single person

in all this great city happier than Julia. Like the Shulamite, her beloved was to her "as a roe, or a young hart leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills, saying that the winter was past and the flowers come back again upon this joyful earth, with the singing of the birds and the putting forth of the green figs upon the fig-tree."

They spent the afternoon and evening of the Sunday together; it was a tolerably fine summer—as summers go—with few wet Sundays, and they were always able to go somewhere. Like most London lads, this young fellow knew all the accessible holiday places and the attractions of each: there is a band in Regent's Park on Sunday afternoons; there is another with a most beautiful pavilion for taking tea at Battersea Park; there are the gardens of Kew, where, he thought, there ought to be a Sunday band, but there isn't; there is the river at Richmond; there are green lanes and country walks round Tottenham, Hornsey, Highgate, and Hampstead; you can easily reach the River Lea from Hoxton; you may even get as far as Epping Forest; if there be tightness as regards money, there are Victoria and Finsbury Parks always open. London is surrounded everywhere by the most delightful places for those who take their summer holidays on Sunday afternoons. To Julia the summer passed in a dream; she looked neither before nor behind; she lived in the present; all the week, whether in the smell of the paste, over the account books, or in the hot theatre, she lived her Sundays over again and recalled the beautiful things her lover had said to her, and thought of the things he had given her, and how he looked while he kissed her in the open street at meeting, and wondered what they should do next Sunday. She learned all kinds of unsuspected things in these walks and excursions: woods, fields, wild-flowers, the voice of the thrush and the blackbird. All these wonders were as new to her as the thoughts of the boy who read the books and papers which he sold, and gathered ideas which he poured into the receptive ear of his companion; so that her mind was full of new thoughts and freshly-created images; she had new hopes: she looked on everything differently; she was no longer satisfied; she was born again, and born full of strange yearnings.

As for Jem, there was never a moment when he ceased to be the most ardent lover; he surrounded her with little cares, as much as if he had been a gentleman and she a young lady. He thought nothing was too good for her: he was never out of temper with her, or cross; it made him as well as his sweetheart perfectly happy only to walk hand in hand along the country paths and by the hedges. He did not drink or smoke; he talked about books and what he read, the newspapers and what went on in the world, so that Julia was ashamed of her ignorance and bought a book with maps; he sometimes brought a book in his pocket, and read to her, sitting in the shade. He was, in fact, a youth of imagination, who might, with

education, have become a poet, and he had simple tastes, so that a cup of tea and some bread and butter in an arbour, with Julia, was to him better than an alderman's feast without her. As for her own tastes, she had none; she thought as he thought, liked what he liked, learned his mind and thought him as wise as he was handsome, and as prudent as he was affectionate.

She walked beside him mostly in silence, while the boy, who was full of generous and wild ideas, a Socialist and a Republican, and a Radical, and believed in his fellow-man, and loved everything that attracts ardent youth, poured out his heart to her, and was repaid when she lifted her beautiful eyes and said: "Oh, Jem, if everyone could talk like you!" Out of all he said there grew up in her mind a new and glorious faith; that things may be ordered better, and that there is a more perfect world where all the men would be as honest and as brave as her Jem, and all the women would be as good as—as Jem thought her.

And every Sunday evening, when they parted at her door in Brunswick Place, while he folded his arms round her and kissed her lips and cheek, she kissed him again, whispering, "Oh, Jem, you *are* kind to me!"

"Hang me!" said Mr. Bradberry, "if I know you any longer, Julia! I suppose it's his doing. Why, you are twice the girl you were! You've got flesh on your bones at last; and you go singing about your work, and you're saucy, you are. Who'd ha' thought to see you saucy? And I really believe your cough has gone for good; and your grandmother tells me you've plucked up spirit at last, and won't let her collar more than half the wages. Came here cryin' she did—wanted me to pay her all of it—says you're an unnatural granddaughter. Never you mind, Julia. I told her if she'd kept you ten years, you'd kept her ten years, and if she made a fuss I'd take you away at once, and where'd she be then?"

It was true. Julia with her new strength gained courage, and actually dared, as has been stated, to deny her grandmother's right to seize all her money. She began, too, in a mean and miserly spirit, to put some of it every week in the post-office bank. More than this, she threatened the old people, if they kept on reproaching her, to leave them altogether.

This promise, together with the prospect of Julia's marriage, alarmed them horribly. They sat together every evening, with limited rations of gin, and discussed the subject from all its different points of view. Could they not, for instance, go with the bride as a sort of dot, so that their right to maintenance by their husband might be acknowledged? Or, if this was impossible, could there not be granted a weekly allowance, such as she now made them? or, better still, could not the match be somehow broken off?

"What he finds in her," said her grandmother, "a skinny little slip of a thing—I don't know. As for her, you can't mention his name but she's up in arms."

"What are you going to do then?" asked her husband, who allowed his wife to do all the scheming, contriving, and thinking, and was not ashamed.

"I shall see," she replied. "You may be sure I'll do something, whatever it is. She thinks she's going to throw over her old grandmother who brought her up, does she? You make sure I'll do something. An ungrateful toad!"

"She is! she is!" murmured the old man, looking at the empty gin bottle.

The old woman was not so nice to look at as the old man, whose creamy white hair and clean-shaven face made him a beautiful object of contemplation. Her own hair had fallen off in patches, and her cap could not completely hide all the ravages of time. Venus Calva, grown old, is not beautiful without the aid of art, and the old lady could not afford to buy a front. Then her eyes were cunning, as if she was always devising some new trick, and her lips were generally in motion, as if she were rehearsing that trick beforehand. Why she looked so cunning cannot be explained on any reasonable theory, because her life, which had been spent in dressing the ladies at the theatre, was not one of those which are generally thought to favour an active exercise of cunning.

She would do something. But what could she do?

First, she thought she might say something to the young man which should chill his passion; but that she knew might be a very difficult thing to do, and would certainly lead to a rupture with Julia, and a row from Mr. Bradberry, whom the old woman feared.

Next she might say something to Julia; but she had tried that already.

Thirdly, she might say something to the young man's relatives. But she did not know who they were, or where they lived.

She turned this difficulty over in her mind for the rest of the week, but said nothing until Sunday morning, when she began by offering to help her granddaughter with some of her work.

"Bless you, my dearie!" she said, with a burst of geniality quite unusual. "Bless you, when my eyes are not bad I'm as good a workwoman as ever. Give me the needle and thread, then; now you go on with your work, and I'll go on with mine. Never mind your grandfather. Let him lie abed if he likes. Ah! if it's only for your own happiness, my dearie, I don't mind. Ho! no, I shan't mind. If he's what he should be, and you deserve, I'll let you go, with a cheerful heart. He's a clerk in a bookstall, isn't he?"

Julia nodded.

"Lor'! And your grandfather always in the same line, too. Seems a Providence, don't it? And who's his relatives, Julia? Are they in the book trade, too?" She held up the dress and looked at it critically, as if she was thinking of that, and the position of Jem's relations did not concern her at all.

Julia, thus taken unawares, told unsuspiciously all there was to tell.

"And his mother," she concluded, "is particular and religious, and a temperance woman, and would not approve of the theatre—I don't know why. So when we're married, I am to stay with Mr. Bradberry, who says he will double my wages, and give up the Grecian. And she's not to be told anything about the theatre."

"Double your wages, will he? Ah! I always said he got you dirt-cheap. And where does the mother of the young gentleman live?"

"She's got a stationer's shop in Goswell Road," said Julia.

"She keeps a shop in the Goswell Road," repeated the grandmother slowly, "and she's religious, and particular, and temperance, and doesn't approve of the theatre? Ho!"

When Julia went off an hour or two later to meet her lover, the old woman put on her bonnet and shawl, and took the nearest way, which is past St. Luke's Hospital, along Old Street. The Goswell Road, which may be considered as the main artery of Clerkenwell, runs from Aldersgate Street to the Angel at Islington, a distance of half a mile or thereabouts. Presently the old woman, slowly walking along the street, and looking at the names over the shops, saw that of "Atherston." The shutters were up, because it was Sunday, but it was clearly a small and mean shop. While she stood there, looking at the name, the door opened, and a woman stood in the doorway. She wore a widow's cap, and carried a Bible in her hand. She was about five-and-forty years of age, and her face was pinched with care; it was not the common carking care of money, because her shop, with the little left by her husband, was enough for her; hers was care of another kind; she was, in fact, in continual trouble and anxiety about her son's soul. It is a kind of trouble which in more Puritanic days made thousands of mothers lead lives of agony with never-ceasing prayers, exhortations, and misgivings. She belonged to a clear-headed and logical sect, which could put the case in unanswerable fashion—either a person is saved or he is not. That is intelligible; certainly those who habitually break the Sabbath, go to theatres, stay out late, and refuse to attend public worship oftener than once a week, cannot possibly be saved. What hope, then, could she entertain of her son?

"You are Mrs. Atherston, m'm?" The old woman advanced boldly and accosted her.

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"I was passing this way, m'm," she said, crossing her hands with the sweetest smile, "and I thought I would look in to make the acquaintance of a lady of whom I've heard so much, and going to be my own near relation, as it might be, m'm."

"I don't know what you mean," said Mrs. Atherston. "I think there must be some mistake."

"Ho! no. Ho! no, m'm," her visitor replied. "I'm Julia's grandmother."

"Who is Julia?"

"What!" the old woman put on a look of amazement. "What! you don't know the name—the very name—of the young lady that your son is agoing to marry?"

"My son—going to marry?" The poor mother's face showed her astonishment. "Who is he going to marry? I know nothing of it. Come in and tell me."

She led the way into her parlour at the back of the shop. The grandmother sat down, untied her bonnet-strings, which in certain circles means friendliness and the intention of having a good long chat.

"Will you," asked Mrs. Atherston, her lips trembling, "will you tell me what you mean about my son?"

"He is going to marry my granddaughter Julia. Lor'! And you not to know about it!"

"And who—pray forgive me—I ought to know—my son has not acted straight with me—I ought to have been told—who are you?"

"Ho!" said the grandmother, "we are respectable people, I assure you: and though we don't keep our own shop we might have done, as many another. My husband has been all his life in Paternoster Row, and is there still, though old and not the man he was. As for me, I was a dresser at the Grecian Theatre till I got the rheumatics in my fingers and couldn't go on. Most respectable we were always."

"And—and your son? You said she was your granddaughter."

"I never had but one child, and she was a gell. Julia's her child, and my gell's dead, with her wedding-ring on her finger. As for Julia's father, I never asked, and I never knew, and so much the better."

Mrs. Atherston received these explanations with a sinking heart. She had, however, one more question.

"What does your granddaughter do for her living?"

"She is engaged, m'm, at the Grecian Theayter, like her grandmother and her mother before her," said the ex-dresser, with a quick look out of her cunning eyes. "She has been on the boards pretty well since she began to walk. Not to speak and act, because the dear girl has got a weak chest and a low voice, but to stand in the front with a pretty dress on, and be a crowd, or a procession, or a chorus of village girls, and she the prettiest of the lot. Oh! you'll be proud of her, m'm, when you see her on the boards; you will indeed. It was at the theayter that your son saw her, and fell in love with her from the front, as many young gentlemen do; not knowing that it's the make-up, or they'd fall in love with the dresser. Then he——"

"Thank you," said Mrs. Atherston; "you have told me quite enough. My son will tell me the rest."

"You are most welcome, m'm," the old woman replied, rising. "And if you'd like to come to the theayter to-morrow evening, I will pass you in either to the back or to the front, whichever you

please. P'r'aps you'd like to see your Julia best from the front. It 'ud make your heart warm to her the quicker, as one may say."

"I never go to theatres."

"Well, it's never too late to begin. And now, m'm, since we've begun friendly, we will continue friendly, and many is the visit I will pay you. P'r'aps some evening I will bring my old man and his pipe, and we will take a glass of something hot together. Lord! He's capital company."

"There is never anything to drink in this house, and tobacco is not allowed." Then the old woman came away with many protestations of friendship. On her way home she nodded her head, shook it, mumbled her lips, winked her eyes, and grinned, insomuch that if there had been any antiquarian person in the street, he would have instantly seized her for a witch, and had her tossed into the City Road Basin to see if she would sink or swim. But there was none, and so she reached home safely, and sat down and reflected at her ease, and with the greatest satisfaction that she had done a beautiful morning's work, and mischief enough to ruin two lives.

"She thinks she is going to leave her old grandmother and marry, and me to go into the House, does she? Does she?" This question she asked a great many times, being in that mood—it has as yet received no name—in which the speaker, having committed some act of atrocious folly or wickedness, feels joyful at heart, and rubs his hands, yet with a certain fearful looking forward, and declares that he is glad he did it, and he would do it again, and he wishes he had done it before, and now everybody shall see.

This day seemed to Julia the happiest she had ever known. After nineteen years of endurance, four months of joy. Well, a great deal of sorrow is forgotten when a little joy comes. Nothing we forget sooner than pain; nothing we remember longer than happiness. Yet, when it has gone altogether, and can never return, there is no greater misery than to remember the joys that are past. This has, I believe, been said before, and even quoted. It is not altogether true. One may remember the joy of having been young without absolute misery; one can remember the dear old days of love and song, dancing, lovers' quarrels, the madness of hope, belief, enthusiasm and passion, without much more than a tender regret: but to lose such joy as Julia's, to have it snatched suddenly, violently, horribly, out of her hand, that, if you please, leaves all the days which are to follow, be they many or few, dark and full of despair.

It was a day in early October; the sweetest autumn day that ever blessed this realm of England; the lovers went together to Hornsey, and wandered in the fields lying north of the unlucky palace on Muswell Hill. They are very quiet fields; few people walk in them even on Sunday afternoons; the sun was bright and the woods were covered with patches of red and gold, the blackberries were ripe on

the hedges—Julia had never tasted a blackberry before—and the long trailing branches already had their leaves painted the most glorious crimson. Presently they sat down together and talked, their hearts open, and hand in hand, and ready to confess each to the other.

First, it was Julia, though it should have been her lover, because it is the man's business to lead off in such matters. She began, with the tears in her eyes, to wonder that so short a time should have made so great a difference to her, and asked herself if it was possible to have lived so long and learned so little. But it was all due to her lover . . . . . "And oh! Jem, Mr. Bradberry will double my wages if I will stay with him; and I can give up the theatre, and your mother shall have no cause to be ashamed of me. You know, dear, though you fell in love with me on the stage, I don't care for it. It seems as if I know it all and how it is done; the place is full of tricks, and they are stale: and besides . . . oh! . . . I shall be glad to give it up."

"If you are glad, Julia," he replied. "I am glad too. I have not spoken to my mother about it, but I will this evening. I will go home earlier, on purpose; and as soon as she approves, dear, we will get married. Where shall we live?"

"If it could be somewhere near fields," she said; "yet there is the business to look after. Jem, don't let us live in Hoxton or Clerkenwell. Don't you feel choked when we go home again after such air as this?"

Thus they built their simple castles in the air, and would do this and that and would prosper greatly, have no unhappiness, never quarrel, never fall into any misfortune, never get old, never have any trouble, and live together for ever afterwards. Then this silly pair kissed each other fondly, and presently got up and walked along beside the straggling hedges. Here they found lovely branches of the crimson-leaved bramble, with fallen leaves of beech and sprays of bryony and clustering nuts and late wild flowers, and so returned home in the evening laden.

They separated early, at half-past eight o'clock, Jem preparing to speak to his mother. When they kissed at the corner of Brunswick Place, the air should have been charged with thunder, ominous flashes of lightning, and heavy drops of rain. But there were no omens at all of coming disaster, nor any presentiments. Julia knew not what omens and presentiments might mean; the London girl is the least superstitious of womankind. Yet even in London a woman should have her warnings.

They parted on this last evening of their happiness with no more than the usual protestations of affection. Jem kissed her as she stood on the door-step with the lover's words of passion and endearment, and she returned his kiss, murmuring as usual, "Oh! Jem, you *are* kind to me!"

V.

When the old woman left her, Mrs. Atherston continued to sit in her back parlour, heedless of the afternoon prayer-meeting and service of song, to which she had intended to go. Her heart was as cold as a stone, her lips were set, her eyes fixed, her cheeks pale. The door of her shop stood open, but she regarded it not; the children peeped in, and seeing nobody, cried "Whoop!" and ran away; but she heard nothing. Her son was going to marry a girl of a theatre. Why, a mother in Israel, if her son had fallen in love with a young Midianitish person, would have been less grieved and outraged than was this poor mother at hearing that her son was entangled with a theatrical woman. If there was one point on which she was more sure and certain than another, it was that the theatre was the House of the Devil. And then her son had deceived her; not one word had he said about the woman. For many months she had been unhappy about him. Sometimes he came home late at night; on Sundays he would not stay with her, but after dinner went off by himself; he had broken away from her control: he had long since refused to follow her any longer in the strict, religious life of the chapel members, with their tea-parties, prayer-meetings, Bible-classes, lectures and expositions; and now she was to learn, she bitterly said to herself, that he had been following in the paths of open sin. That was how she put it, never doubting but that Julia was a Delilah, who had enticed and overcome her boy. He was going to marry her; she was a girl who had an unknown father, and a grandmother, also an old servant of the theatre, who spoke in affectionate praise of drink. This was what his love of freedom had come to; he was a lost boy; her prayers were in vain; he was rushing blindfold to the abyss.

Presently she began mechanically to turn over the leaves of her Bible. It seemed as if her eyes fell only upon the cursing Psalms, the denunciations of the Prophets, and the fate of scoffers—that is, of course, those who go to the theatre; the sudden ruin of the wicked - especially of theatre people; she associated everything in her mind with the mad and profligate career which she believed her son was leading. When it grew dark she lit her gas, and went on with her reading and her thoughts.

At nine o'clock or so Jem came home. He hung up his hat and swung into the room with his customary masterfulness. To-night he was quite happy: he was going to tell his mother everything, and he was home early so that they could have a good talk. He had neglected his mother a little, perhaps; that would be all made up to her now, by Julia. She was going to leave the theatre:

nothing at all need be said about her connection with it: Julia was a bookbinder's accountant—a most respectable employment.

"Well, mother," he said airily. "I am early to-night, because I have something very serious to say. I ought to have told you before; but never mind that. Mother, I am going to make you happy." He laid his elbows on the table and looked his mother in the face with eyes so confiding and a smile so frank that her heart yearned within her. But the thought of the girl from the theatre and the old woman who wanted drink, hardened her heart.

"Go on, James," she said severely.

"Now, mother," he continued, "it's the Sabbath night, I know, and your head is full of the sermon and all. But you and me haven't hit it quite off lately, have we? As for me, I never could see the harm of a country walk on a Sunday afternoon, when you're locked up all the week."

"Go on, James." She tried her best to be hard and unforgiving; thanks to the sweet influence of her sect, she succeeded. "Go on, James. You have got something to tell me."

"Very well, mother: I am going to make you happy, because I am going to give you a daughter-in-law; not a common flighty sort of a girl, you know, but a steady, quiet girl, who, I dare say, will go to chapel regular when you have got her in hand."

A steady, quiet girl! This was a part of the great deception. A quiet girl! The widow pictured to herself a young person with roving eyes, loud laugh, and hair cut short, so as to lie, an inch and a half long, over the forehead. This was her idea of the daughter-in-law whom her son proposed to present to her.

"Go on," she added icily.

"I made her acquaintance, mother, four months ago. I ought to have told you about her then; but I didn't know how far it would go, nor if she would be the right kind of girl. Mother"—at the moment he forgot about the theatre—"if you had to pick and choose out of all London, you couldn't find a girl you'd like so much—you couldn't, really! You'll try to like her, won't you, mother? You won't be vexing about whether she's a Baptist or a Primitive Methodist, or whether she's saved or not, and had conviction of sin and that, will you, now?"

"Go on," said his mother.

"Well, that is about all I've got to say about her. Next Sunday, mother, she shall come to—to——" he could not help the hesitation, because how would Julia like it?—"she shall come to chapel with us."

"Is that all?"

"That's all about her," replied the lad cheerfully. "But I say, mother, there's trouble again at the stall. To-morrow is the day, you know, and I'm behind again—I'm two pounds behind. I know it's the fifth time, and I declare I'm as careful as I can be; I believe somebody steals the books. Two pounds is a lot of money, isn't it?

But you've got more than that belonging to me—a good many hundreds more. And I must have the money to-morrow before twelve o'clock—I MUST !"

"Softly—softly, James. Must is not the word." The money belonged to the young man, who was already of age ; but his mother had it and kept it, because to part with it was parting with power, and he did not know that he could legally take it whenever he pleased. Power ? why, it might mean the salvation of his soul ! "Softly, James. Before you get that money we must have a little further explanation. How has that two pounds been lost ? In Sabbath-breaking and bad company ?"

"No ; nor yet in country walks on Sunday in good company. It's only that the accounts have got a little wrong. Now, mother, don't let us begin about Sabbath-breaking, please, I always do get my accounts muddled. You know I do."

"In what company did you take these walks ?"

"In Julia's." His cheek grew red and his eyes flashed. There was danger ahead.

"Julia is her name, is it ? She is, you said——"

"She keeps his accounts for a bookbinder in the City Road."

"James," said his mother calmly, "you are a liar."

The boy sprang to his feet, and banged his fist upon the table.

"I am not a liar. She keeps the accounts at Bradberry's the bookbinder's."

"You are a liar, James. She is a painted Creature, and she acts at the Grecian Theatre. I know all. You are a liar, James, whose lot is in the Pit with devils to dwell. She is a painted acting hussy, You are a liar." She spoke without external wrath, but judicially.

"She keeps the books all day, and she goes on the boards all the evening. Poor Julia !"

His mother was silent.

"After all," cried the boy, "I am not obliged to consult you about my wife. If you like her, very well : if you don't, I can't help it. There isn't in the world a better girl than Julia."

"You will give her up," said his mother.

"I will not give her up. Nothing shall make me give her up."

"You want this money to-morrow morning. You shall not have it, unless you give her up."

"I will not give her up." His cheek paled, and he trembled from head to foot. "Mother, do you know what you are saying ? The House never lets anybody off. They make an example of everyone who is short, on principle. Do you know what you are saying ?"

"Give her up," she said. "Give up your actress."

"Let me have the money," he cried. "It is mine. My father left it to me."

"Not to be wasted on play-acting. Give her up."

"I will never give her up."

"Then you shall have no money."

He stared at his mother, his very lips white. *Could* she know what her words meant?

He told her in plain unmistakable terms.

"Give her up," she repeated. "You shall not have the money unless you give her up."

"Is this your last word?" he asked.

"Give her up," she said.

He slowly rose and took his hat.

"Mother," he said, "you will remember, afterwards, that no one but yourself done it. I haven't stolen the money. It's only got behind. Anybody can get behind. I've been so happy that I didn't count it up regular. No one but yourself done it. All the rest of your life you'll remember that. As for me, if you refuse me the money I swear you shall never see me again, whatever happens. And as for your religion, if people who do such things to their sons are taken to Heaven, I pray they will never take me. Say it once more, so that I may never again bear to think of you. Say it again, so that I can face the worst and remember that you, and none but you, done it."

"Give her up," she said, looking him in the face with hard and determined eyes. "Blasphemer, give her up."

He hesitated: he put on his hat—he took it off—he looked about the room. It was the room in which he had been brought up; the little living room behind the shop in which he had played at his mother's knee. He was leaving it for the last time; he was going forth to certain and lifelong disgrace.

"Mother!" he cried once more, throwing out his arms.

"Give up the painted woman," she repeated fiercely.

He put on his hat and left her.

All that night he walked up and down the street under Julia's room. She was asleep behind the window, that he knew. If she had been awake she might have put her head out of the window, and talked with her lover. But she was asleep—she was tired—she had been for a long walk, and her head was full of briars and blackberries, and woods with golden leaves; she was sound asleep and dreaming happily. She didn't wake even at the fall of the step she knew so well. At five o'clock he felt faint, and went to an early coffee-house for some breakfast. Then he wandered aimlessly about until it was time to open his stall at the railway station; and there he stood, anxious, haggard, heavy-eyed, waiting the hour of doom.

Observe, if you please, that this boy was a fool. He had only to go to anybody who knew him—to Mr. Bradberry, for instance—and tell his story to get the money. But of this he did not think, until too late. As for getting behind that had happened once or twice before, and the small deficit had been met by his mother: and as for his money, he was of age, and she ought to have given it to him many months before. But he did not think of this either.

He was accustomed to feel her power over him. If she would not give him the money, he could not get it elsewhere, he thought. So he sat and waited.

And in the parlour behind the shop sat his mother. She said to herself from time to time, with dry lips, "I have wrestled to save his soul;" but she could not rise from her chair, and she sat there all the night expecting the boy to come home and make submission. He had always been a dutiful boy hitherto. Besides, he must have the money. He would come back. He could not do without the money. But the daylight broke through the dingy blinds of the room behind the shop, and the sun rose upon the grimy back-yard, and the boy did not come back.

VI.

On Monday afternoon Julia sat at the high desk in the little dingy counting-house over her books. From the workshop came the usual sounds of business, the regular thud of the steam-engine, the hammering and stamping, with the smell of sour paste, to which she was accustomed. Her thoughts were so pleasant that she stopped in her work from time to time to lose herself in a dream of happiness. Why, only four months ago, she did not know what was even meant by happiness, or if there were such a thing allotted to mankind, any more than an omnibus horse understands the freedom of his wild brothers. And now she had been happy for a whole summer, though her work was quite as hard, and the grandfather quite as trying, and the theatre quite as noisy and hot. A whole summer of happiness!

Truly, considering the thing from the last century point of view, when happiness was considered as strictly limited to the landed gentry, and only usurped, so to speak, by the better class of merchants, she ought to have been satisfied, seeing that her "betters" often get little more than four solid months of perfect happiness in their whole lives. Yet she was not satisfied. Happiness is a thing which never satisfies. Unreasonable people have even laid claim to nothing short of a right—a right, if you please—to seventy years' solid happiness; and grumble when they get instead no more than fifty years or so of misery and disappointment. What ought Julia to have looked for in her humble position and considering her birth? To-day, however, she was quite happy, with a feeling of physical strength which came of all their Sunday walks, the fresh air, and the birth of sweet thoughts; a feeling of strength which was new and delightful. She gently crooned, as she added up the figures, a tune which had neither beginning nor end—and, indeed, she was not fond of music, because she always had to stand just in front of the orchestra; and if you are within a couple of feet

of the big drum, the bassoon, or the French horn, every night, you are apt to get a disturbed idea of tune, and to form incomplete theories on the subject of music. Presently Mr. Bradberry came in from his daily round among his customers. He too was in great good temper, because he had just done a good stroke in forty-shilling work.

"Julia," he said, "the sooner you give up your grandmother and the theatre and get married to that young fellow the better, mind that. I saw the old woman yesterday walking down Goswell Road, near his mother's shop, and I hope she hasn't been contriving mischief. Don't you think I'm going to give you more money for her."

Julia smiled, and went on adding up.

"As for your spark, my girl, he's a good-looking sort of a chap, and you'll make a pretty couple. I've had my eye on him a good while, and I've given him my mind more than once. A smart young fellow, but a little careless. Keep him with a tight rein when you're married. But a good lad. And he's fond of you, Julia, and that goes a long way. What does he think of the old woman?"

"He has never seen her. I've told him all about her. But I don't want him to be giving her money for drink."

"Did you tell him about Saturday night?"

"Oh yes! I told him all. I haven't hid anything from Jem, and don't mean to."

"Well, I suppose that's the best way to begin. I was never married myself, and never wanted, finding it quite enough to manage the girls upstairs without a wife as well. No secrets from each other. Seems a sound way of beginning, doesn't it? especially when there's none to hide. Have you seen his mother yet?"

"No," said Julia. "Jem was to speak to her last night."

"I know her," Mr. Bradberry continued. "When I heard where she lived and who she was, I went to see her. She keeps a little shop for stationery, books, and papers, and such, and is patronized by her connection, which is Baptist. She's one of those who torture their lives with thinking of their souls. Give her a wide berth, Julia, and don't let her make mischief between you. Such as her are best in their chapels, where they can sit upright and pity the poor souls outside."

Just then the door opened and a woman in a widow's cap and crapes came in. Her white face betokened the most violent agitation.

"It's the very woman!" cried Mr. Bradberry. "It's the boy's mother!"

Julia got down quickly from her desk, and placed herself beside the old bookbinder as if for protection. For the woman—Jem's mother—glared at her with a rage that was for a while speechless. The sight of the woman's eyes terrified the girl. What was the matter with her?

"Is this the Creature?" she cried at last, pointing with a trembling finger, and asking the question of Mr. Bradberry.

"If you mean Julia, and your son's sweetheart, it is," he replied. "As for creature—if you come to that——"

"Oh!" She paused for a few moments, and then—then—the torrent of her wrath overflowed, and with the eloquence of a maddened woman she poured forth such reproaches, charges, and accusations, with such a string of names, every one of the worst and vilest, as such a woman so outraged, so prejudiced, in such madness of shame and rage as then possessed her, could command.

Julia caught the old man's hand, but made no reply.

"Steady, Julia, steady! Let the woman have her say. Steady, my girl! don't answer back. Easy to call names. Best hold our tongues. It's Jem's mother, my dear. Pity poor Jem. 'Tisn't his fault. Don't give her a handle. As for you, ma'am, the sooner you've done the better; because this is a respectable office, and such things as you've said mustn't be said to any girl in this place. If the girl wasn't Julia, and her young man your son, you would have been run out neck and crop long ago. Don't cry, Julia!"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Atherston, panting, with her hand to her heart. "Oh, that I should live to see my son disgraced for ever for the sake of a painted——"

"Draw it mild, ma'am. Where's the disgrace? As for this girl, she's as good as gold, and your son isn't worthy to have such a wife. Where's the disgrace? Come now, give over calling names. Where's the disgrace?"

"Good!" she cried. "Good! When she play-acts in short petticoats at the Grecian Theatre? Good! When it's through her that my son is in prison—and his good name—oh, thank God! his father is dead—his good name——"

"Prison!" cried Julia. "Jem in prison! What has he done?"

"Stolen the money to pay for your wicked and sinful extravagances. Oh! . . ." (Again the names which conveyed her meaning without the least room for doubt.)

"Jem never stole any money!" cried Julia.

"Stolen the money—for you! Gone to prison—for you! Disgraced for life—for you! Oh, I kept him all I could from the evil woman! I warned him. 'Her feet go down to death, her steps take hold on hell.' It was for your sake—oh, for you!—and for your sake he refused to make submission and have the money to set him right."

"How much was it?" asked Mr. Bradberry.

"Two pounds he was short. I offered it to him if he would submit and give up the wicked woman."

"You offered it him? Miserable woman!" The old man banged the table with his fist. "You have sent your son to gaol for the sake of your cursed obstinacy and your ignorance. Go—you shall stay here no longer!"

A man must not lift his hand upon a woman save in the way of kindness, but Mr. Bradberry literally hurled himself upon Mrs. Atherston, and pushed her, still crying reproaches upon poor Julia, into the street. She stood there upon the kerbstone for ten minutes longer, waiting for Julia to come out. Then she turned and walked quickly home.

Yes, the books had been inspected and the stock examined, and Jem was two pounds short.

The rule of the House was like the rule of the London bankers: every man who is short in his accounts is prosecuted for embezzlement. The rule is perfectly well understood. Those who take service in the House know that no exception is ever made, no pardon ever extended. To use for their own purposes the moneys belonging to the House is embezzlement. Four times before, on the approach of the auditor, Jem had found himself a pound or two short. Four times his mother made it up for him in good time. Now he was two pounds short, and his mother refused to give him the money.

He was smitten, I have said, with the blindness which sometimes falls upon men before their ruin; had he gone to Mr. Bradberry he could have borrowed the money from him. Julia herself had saved a good deal more since she began to refuse her grandmother. But he could only think of the undeserved reproaches of his mother and her refusal to help him. And so he did nothing, and was taken by the auditor to the central office. Perhaps—I do not know—but perhaps, in spite of the rule, he might still have saved himself by sending for Mr. Bradberry, but he said nothing; he offered no excuses; he made no attempt to defend himself: he suffered it to be understood that he had wilfully and deliberately stolen the money in a lump, instead of being careless day after day about the pence until the loss swelled up to so frightful an amount.

Then he was taken by a policeman to Clerkenwell and charged. He said nothing, and was remanded till next day.

"Cheer up, Julia," said Mr. Bradberry. "It is but a little sum. Two pounds! Why, I will lend it to him. You wait here while I take it to the head office. I'll bring the boy back with me."

Alas! he little understood the procedure of a criminal court! The boy was a prisoner. At the head office they refused to take the money. The case, they said, was a bad one: he was young, and had been promoted and trusted; his mother had been to them about it; the woman was greatly to be pitied, but in justice to their own people they must prosecute. Besides, it appeared from the mother's statement that her son had fallen into bad company. For the sake of their *employés* they would not show leniency to one who kept bad company.

"It's a lie!" cried Mr. Bradberry, in a rage. "The boy's mother is a mad-woman. She knows nothing about it. He has never been in bad company."

Then they told him that they could not have violent people there, and they shoved him out. So he returned sorrowful and ashamed and hanging his head.

"Julia," he said, trying to keep up her heart, "have courage. I'll go and give evidence myself to-morrow."

VII.

JULIA went to the Police Court with Mr. Bradberry, and took a seat in the last bench of the public gallery. The old man spoke without ceasing all the way on the certainty of the boy's acquittal. What was it?—two pounds! The wrong addition of a column. Julia herself sometimes added up wrong; as for replacing the money, he was ready to do it himself; why, there was not a more honest lad in all London; let Julia cheer up, all would be well. He spoke so fast and so confidently, indeed, that a more experienced person than Julia might have perceived his anxiety. Outside the Court the pavement was crowded with little groups of people, friends of the prisoners; the individuals vary from day to day, but the groups always seem the same; most of them are women; a good many carry babies in their arms, some of them have their heads tied up. They are all passionately arguing the case from their own point of view. From time to time one detaches herself from the rest and rushes, not without a wild, tragic gesture, into the Court, where she will give eager and impassioned evidence, or will sit in the gallery and grind her teeth because she is not allowed to curse the Court.

The gallery is only a little square box with four benches, capable of holding about thirty people; those who sat there were like those who stood outside, but Julia took no notice of them. People who live in Hoxton do not pay much attention to the external appearance of other people, even though their heads be tied up in blood-stained handkerchiefs, or their eyes blackened, or their faces stamped with every kind of ungovernable passion. It was not to see these people she had come, but to see the Court and to see her lover in his trouble. Jem steal money? Jem a thief? Never!

In front of the gallery was a narrow passage, in which stood a very big policeman; and next to that was the prisoners' dock, for all the world like a family pew: then came an open space with a table and seats for clerks and solicitors; and lastly, surrounded by red curtains, the magistrate's desk and seat. When this terrible man, who has power given to him to lock up people, take away their good name, and bring shame and disgrace upon a whole family, took his seat, they began to bring in the cases. First, the drunken and disorderly cases, men and women, whose faces Julia seemed to know: it is an odd thing about London,

that if you walk about it long enough you seem to know all the faces there are. Some of them were old and grey-headed—Julia thought of her grandfather; some were women, old, young, and middle-aged; but she had seen many such women before. One was a young gentleman, who said his name was William Smith, and that he was a medical student; he was fined, and a friend who happened to be in Court paid the fine for him, and they went off together, the medical student looking ashamed of himself, and envious, perhaps, of the happy lot of those upon whom strong drink comes with smiles and friendly speech, because such do never wander into a dock, but are lovingly propped against the wall by policemen, or led gently home. It is a misfortune for a gentleman to get quarrel some in his cups.

When these cases had been all disposed of, there came the more serious charges. First, a man was brought up for stealing a pair of boots. He was a most miserable creature, who looked as if he had once been respectable and once been handsome. He was remanded in order that something more might be found out about him. And then there was a fellow with a bullet-head and no forehead to speak of, who had knocked down an old man and robbed him of twopence. He too was remanded in order that his history might be inquired into, and a black history it very probably proved to be.

Then came—alas! alas!—the case of James Atherston.

The girl at the back of the Court caught her breath and trembled when her lover stepped into the shameful dock. His cheek was flushed and angry, his teeth were set; he grasped the bar before him with both hands and stood upright, gazing straight before him; but he saw nothing, because his soul was filled with a burning rage. It was his own mother who had brought him here; it was his mother who had slandered his girl—his own mother.

The case was briefly stated, and Jem was asked to plead. He shook his head and murmured something which the Court took to mean "Guilty." Then a solicitor rising, said that he was instructed by the House which employed the prisoner, to state that they were compelled to prosecute every case of embezzlement. Another solicitor said that he was instructed to defend the prisoner, and that he should not deny the alleged deficit, but he should show that the character of the prisoner had been excellent until he had fallen into bad company, and fallen into the hands of a designing woman, and he should therefore wish the magistrate to deal leniently with the prisoner.

At the words "designing woman" Julia clasped her hands tight, but made no sign.

Then the principal witness deposed to the deficit in the cash, but stated that the books had been correctly kept, without any attempt at falsifying the accounts; nor did the prisoner try to conceal the deficit. On being asked by the witness if he could not make it up, he said that his mother had refused to give him the money.

The magistrate here remarked that he supposed his mother had not the money to give.

"No," said the witness, "his mother is a very respectable woman with a shop and some money of her own. But she refused to help him."

"That," said the magistrate, "is very extraordinary."

"She came to the House when it was too late," said the witness, "and offered the money, and said that she would have given it to him before, but he refused to give up his bad ways and company."

Then the policeman who took the lad into custody gave his evidence. And then the solicitor who was defending the prisoner called his mother, and Mrs. Atherston herself stepped into the witness-box.

She was pale, her lips were set firm, and her eyes were hard. But she would not look at her son, who, for his part, fixed his eyes upon her with a kind of stupor. What had he done that his own mother should have brought this evil upon him?

She said that her son was twenty-one years of age, and had always been a good son to her, and steady in his habits, though not yet convinced of sin; that it was not until the spring of that year that he began to come home late at night, and to spend his Sabbaths in riot with profligate companions; that she had only just discovered that he had formed an acquaintance with a wicked woman —here Mr. Bradberry groaned, but Julia seemed not to hear—who was a dancer or acting person at the Grecian Theatre; "one of those," she added, "who is on the way going down to the Chambers of Death." It was to find the money for these debaucheries that he spent all his own wages and the money of his employers.

The magistrates asked her if she had refused to give him the money?

She said she had offered him the money on the simple condition of giving up this girl—that he was infatuated with her, and refused.

"You knew," said the magistrate, "that if he could not make up his accounts, he would be brought here."

"I knew that," she said. "The shame and disgrace will be upon my head all the rest of my life; but I would rather a thousand times that he were in a gaol than throwing away his soul in his company of wicked women. In prison he will have, I suppose, the Bible to read, and he cannot break the Sabbath. Perhaps he will forget the woman."

Mr. Bradberry, grinding his teeth, looked sharply at Julia. She was listening with bowed head and clasped hands, but she made no sign. No more bad words could hurt her now.

"I have no other witnesses, sir," said the solicitor.

Then Mr. Bradberry rose and asked permission to say a word in evidence. He went into the witness-box and was sworn. Then he began to say that he knew both the young man and the girl to

whom he was engaged: that he had employed the girl for some years——

Here the magistrate interrupted him, saying that he wished to give the prisoner the benefit of previous good character, and that the young woman had better not be brought into the case any more. In fact, he spoke out of the kindness of his heart, and because a simple vague impression of bad company, and a shadowy Delilah is better for a prisoner than an exact description of orgies and profligacy. If it is only known in general terms that the idle apprentice has fallen into bad ways, he is not regarded with anything like the contempt which is his lot when Hogarth draws those ways with unsparing pencil. Therefore the magistrate bade Mr. Bradberry stand aside, and asked the prisoner what he had to say for himself. Jem shook his head: he had nothing. If he had said anything, it would have been in railing and bitterness against his mother. It was she who had brought this evil upon him; his own mother had done it. And so his tongue clave unto the roof of his mouth, and he said nothing, but shook his head.

Then the magistrate said that it was a very painful case. Here was evidently a young man carefully and religiously brought up, who had fallen into temptation—the world was full of such temptations. He wished all such young men in London could learn a lesson from this case, of the misery which follows upon bad company and the society of ballet-girls and the like. And then he sentenced the prisoner to four months' imprisonment, and the case was over, and Jem taken from the dock and led out of sight.

The next case was called on. The solicitor for the defence began to whisper with the solicitor for the prosecution, and they laughed together: and Julia thought it strange that they should laugh; and she saw Mrs. Atherston with set lips walk quickly out of the Court.

"Come, Julia," said Mr. Bradberry, "we have done no good; let us go home."

They went back together to the bookbinding-shop. It was two o'clock. Mr. Bradberry sent out for some dinner; but Julia refused to take any, and sat down saying nothing. Then she took off her hat and jacket, climbed upon her high stool, and opened her books, and sat over them till six o'clock.

Mr. Bradberry presently went away and left her alone.

At five o'clock he returned.

"Julia," he said, "it was your grandmother went round to Jem's mother, and told her you were engaged at the theatre. Did it on purpose to make mischief, because she was afraid you'd marry, and she'd have to go into the House."

Julia turned her sad eyes heavily upon him, but said nothing.

In the evening she went to the theatre as usual, and played her part. That is to say, she was beautifully dressed in a pink and white frock, shorter than is at present worn in society, with an apron stuck all over with bunches of pink ribbons; had pink ribbons at her

shoulders, and a pretty little straw hat with pink ribbons. She was one of a bevy of village maidens; and while the heroine was dragged away by the villain, she turned her eyes upon the pit, and smiled upon whole rows of young fellows, whose hearts beat faster only to think how happy would be the shepherd who could call so sweet a creature his own.

When she could get away it was already past eleven. The dancing platform was deserted, and the orchestra was empty: but dancing was going on in the great hall, where the band was playing.

She stopped and looked at the scene. Then there fell upon her suddenly, and for the first time in her life, a full sense of what the magistrate meant, and Jem's mother meant, and the solicitor meant, and everybody understood. Why, in this vulgar Ranelagh, this workgirls' Vauxhall, there were in plenty—what Jem's mother had called her. Everybody thought the same of her except Mr. Bradberry. It was she, and no other, who had dragged the poor boy to prison—everybody said so.

She ought to have understood the thing fully before; but she did not, nor, indeed, could she ever understand why they so regarded her. If you see every night of your life—from nine to nineteen—the same scene, you think nothing of it—you attach no meaning to it. Now, however, the theatre and her grandmother—half her life—suddenly became impossible: she could never stand upon the stage again, or enter again the gates of the Royal Grecian.

She saw standing in the doorway with others a girl she knew as formerly one of Mr. Bradberry's folders—one of the thousands of London girls who live by themselves and enjoy—poor creatures!—perfect freedom.

"Emily," she said, "I'm not going home any more. Take me with you for to-night."

"Why, Julia," the other cried, "surely *you* are not——"

"I'm never going to my grandmother's any more. Let me go home with you to-night."

VIII.

Julia did not go any more to the theatre, nor did she go home to her grandmother. She got a bedroom for herself, and she continued to keep the books for Mr. Bradberry, and to collect the moneys due to him. This took her all the day. In the evening she sat by herself in her room thinking. She had never got into the habit of reading, and she had no friends, and she wanted no amusement; so she sat thinking and remembering. Sometimes, however, she remained in the office with the old man, who smoked his pipe and discoursed on the iniquity of people being allowed to be poor. Julia listened, but said nothing; yet it was some sort of company for her. She had become quite silent, and, in fact, had gone back to her old style,

and was again a passive, quiet girl, who took the work that was assigned to her and did it faithfully. She never grumbled or complained, or seemed to think that she had a claim to anything, or rights of her own, or reason for expecting any good fortune. The elasticity was gone out of her feet: the colour had left her cheek; her shoulders were round again; her chest was flat: she looked upon the ground as she walked: the little fineries with which she decked herself to walk with Jem all vanished, and were no more seen.

Yet she could not quite go back to the old monotony; the Sunday spent in the former way would have been intolerable. Therefore, on that day, when it was fine, she went out by herself, and wandered alone among the fields and country lanes which Jem had shown her. The fields were now wet and swampy: the hedges were bare: the ditches where she had picked the wild-flowers were full of dead, brown leaves. She walked along the wet paths over the swampy grass, living over again the happy days she had spent here with her lover: or she sat crouched upon the steps of a stile in the lonely place, whither no one came but herself, remembering the sunshine and happiness of the summer, while the morning turned into afternoon, and the short winter's day closed in. Then she would remember that Jem was in prison, and that she was the bad company who brought him there, and would go slowly home and sit in her solitary room. A sad and unhealthy life! Always, with the recollection of the past joy, the reproach that all the mischief was her own doing! Her lover was sitting in a prison-cell, dressed in prison-garb! Poor Jem! Poor Jem! He had fallen into bad company. She was the bad company; she was the wicked woman whom the magistrate held up as a warning; it was she who had led him astray from the paths of virtue. They said this because she was a theatre-girl: otherwise no one would have said it. And she had been in the theatre since she could walk, and never knew that she was wicked! It was strange!

I once read a story of a little girl who had to make her first confession. In her desire to clear her soul of all its sins, she learned from a book (kindly provided by the Church for the purpose) all the possible sins, together with those that were impossible for her. Then she knelt before her priest, and awakened him from the drowsy half-attention with which I am told these functionaries receive children's confessions by a confession of the most startling kind. It began with the commoner forms of sin, such as murder, robbery, sacrilege, and so forth, going steadily up the scale to gormandizing and guzzling. Never was priest so astonished.

If Julia had met a priest, and that priest had ordered her to kneel down and confess, she would have said: "I am a painted hussy; I am an abandoned woman: I have led a young man into sin—to his ruin and undoing: I am bad company; my feet lead to the chambers of death; my wickedness should be a warning and an

example to all young men." And to questions of more detail, she would have added that the work of ruin had been accomplished by nothing worse than walking in the fields with him where others walked, and taking tea in tea-gardens where others took tea. I wish Julia had met that priest.

When the Sunday was wet, and she could not go into the country, Julia went timidly, because she did not feel as if she had any business there, to the churches and chapels. The music and singing pleased her; the service was some kind of show, the nature of which she only imperfectly understood. Once or twice she went to Salvation Army meetings, where the clanging of the cymbals, the blowing of the trumpets, and the shouting of the speakers, brought back reminiscences of the melodrama. When all the people sang together, and she saw the infection of religious fervour spreading from bench to bench, and men and women clutching each other, and weeping aloud, and calling out "Glory!" her heart too was moved, and she shed tears which seemed to be those of conviction. But when they exhorted her to step forth and sit on the stool of repentance, and to cast her sins before the Cross, she hardened again, because she was ignorant of having committed any sin, though she certainly had the misfortune to have been a girl of the theatre.

Early in December, perhaps brought on by her lonely walks in the winter fields, her cough came back to her, and tore her to pieces. In January it became worse, giving her no rest night or day; so that she grew thinner in the cheek, and her shoulders grew rounder and her chest more hollow.

Then Mr. Bradberry took her out of her lodging, and gave her a bedroom—I believe it was his own—over his office, and would not let her go out at all except in the daytime, and then only when there was no cold wind. His manner was soft and kind now to the girl; he tried to find things that would tempt her to eat; he got a doctor for her, and made her take medicines; and he set himself, with all the art he knew, to lift the despair and gloom off the poor girl's soul—setting forth, first, that Jem would soon be out again, and must be received with welcome and a smile, because he had done nothing wrong at all, unless carelessness was wrong; and that as for herself, she had nothing to reproach herself with, because, of all the innocent girls in the world, she was the most innocent; and so forth. But his words had no other effect than to make her cry; and when he spoke of her lover coming out of prison, she shuddered, because he would doubtless have forgotten her, as his mother hoped, or he would have learned to think of her as bad company, and so be ashamed ever to speak to her again. You see, after a girl has had so many hard words said to her, a few kind ones easily make her cry.

I think it was on the afternoon of the last Sunday in February—Jem was to come out on the first Monday in March—that Mr. Bradberry met, walking in the City Road together, Julia's grandfather

and grandmother. They were out for the day, by permission of the Master; in fact, they now wore the beautiful and tasteful uniform of the St. Luke's Workhouse. Nobody could look more venerable, more virtuous, or more hardly used by Fortune than this pair. It seemed to passers-by as if they must have spent their all in good works and acts of charity, which accounted for their condition of truly honourable poverty, so creamy-white was the old man's hair, so serene the old woman's countenance.

Mr. Bradberry stopped in front of them and snorted.

"As for Julia, now——" he began.

"Oh, the wicked and ungrateful hussy!" said the grandmother. "Oh! to go away and leave her old grand——"

"As for Julia," he repeated, interrupting, "I believe she's dying. I thought I'd tell you: not that I am going to let you see her or trouble her last days, poor thing. She's got no money for you; but I tell you what I'll do. Yes: you used to get drunk once a week, at least, out of her money. Well, Julia shall give you one more chance. There—go along with you and drink it up; it's the last you'll have." He handed them two or three shillings, which the old woman snatched: and then the pair walked on in silence, and Mr. Bradberry stood with his hands in his pockets looking after them. "Poor girl!" he murmured; "she never had a fair chance. Oh! *nobody* ought to be poor!"

At eight o'clock one Monday morning Jem was liberated. Coming out of prison, I am given to understand, is even worse than going in, for such offenders as this young man. When he passed through the accursed gates, and stood in the street a free man again, his cheek reddened with the shame which he had hardly felt in the cell, and his heart fell low as lead, and his eyes swam so that he saw nothing. Then some one touched him on the arm, and he recovered and turned his head.

It was his mother. Jem groaned, and shrank back with a look of horror.

"You?" he cried, shaking her off with a gesture which she will never forget. "You, who put me in there and disgraced me for life? You come to see my shame?"

"I am here," she replied, "to know how it goes with your soul. Have you repented?"

"Repented!"

"The man Bradberry came to me last night," she went on coldly. "He tells me that the woman—your former companion—has been struck down by Heaven in her iniquities—her cup being full—and is now dying. He accused me of causing her death—but that is nothing. Save once when I told her plain truth about herself, I have not meddled with her. Go to her therefore, and, if possible, repent together."

He listened no longer, but rushed away. I think that he will never see his mother any more.

He thought nothing of Julia's wasted face and weakness and vanished beauty. As soon as she lifted her great eyes wistfully when he opened the door, the old love came back to him—but it had never left him—with a yearning tenderness, and a bitterness of self-reproach he had never felt in the prison. He threw himself on his knees before her, and caught her hands. "Oh! Julia! Julia!" he cried, "forgive me. It is I who have brought this suffering upon you. I did not know, indeed I didn't. I thought my accounts were square—I did indeed—and my mother would not give me my own money. Oh! Julia!" He burst into such tears and weeping as went to her very heart.

"No, Jem," she said, weeping with him, "you mustn't cry. It was my fault. Everybody says it was my fault. The magistrate said so. Forgive me and go away. You mustn't keep bad company any more. But I didn't know. I didn't mean to be bad company for you. I loved you too much to harm you, Jem. Don't think I meant it. Oh! Jem, you *were* kind to me!"

He swore, kissing her and weeping again, that he would never leave her any more. Her cough should go away. She should get strong again. But she shook her head.

"No, Jem," she said, "I am going to die. The doctor says I shall die very soon. He told Mr. Bradberry so. And oh, Jem! there's never been an hour but I've been with you in your prison. Even at night I seemed to sit with you and hear your poor heart beat. Poor Jem! Don't take on. Oh! don't take on, Jem, about me. There's many and many better than me in the world—not theatre girls, you know—girls your mother will like. Don't mind me. Mr. Bradberry says it doesn't hurt to die. And perhaps, he says—he doesn't know, but perhaps—there'll be flowers and hedges like Muswell Hill."

"Yes," said Jem. "Yes; there's bound to be, Julia. There's bound to be."

"Stay with me, Jem. Oh! I am so glad to get you back again! Stay with me, Jem, won't you? Stay with me. You won't go away, will you? Oh! Jem, you *are* kind to me!"

SIR JOCELYN'S CAP.*

I.

"THIS," said Jocelyn, throwing himself into a chair, "is the most wonderful thing I ever came across."

Do you know how, sometimes in the dead of night, or even in broad daylight, while you are thinking, you distinctly hear a voice which argues with you, puts the case another way, contradicts you, or even accuses you, and calls names?

This happened to Jocelyn. A voice somewhere in the room, and not far from his ear, said clearly and distinctly, "There is something here much more wonderful." It was a low voice, yet metallic, and with a cluck in it as if the owner had begun life as a Hottentot.

Jocelyn started and looked around. He was quite alone. He was in chambers in Piccadilly: a suite of four rooms; outside there was the roll of carriages and cabs, with the trampling of many feet; at five o'clock on an afternoon in May, and in Piccadilly, one hardly expects anything supernatural. When something of the kind happens at this time, it is much more creepy than the same thing at midnight. The voice was perfectly distinct and audible. Jocelyn felt cold and trembled involuntarily, and then was angry with himself for trembling.

"Much more wonderful," repeated this strange voice with the cluck. Jocelyn pretended not to hear it. He was quite as brave as most of his brother-clerks in the Foreign Office, but in the matter

* It is due to Mr. Charles Brookfield to state that the idea of this story is entirely his. He suggested it one day at the Savile Club to Mr. Walter Pollock and myself, and we amused ourselves for an hour or two in devising sundry situations which might result from the zeal of a demon grown incapable by age and infirmity of fully carrying out his master's wishes. Most of these situations are embodied in the following pages, which were afterwards written by Mr. Pollock and myself. I have to thank Mr. Pollock for his kind permission to include the sketch in this volume.

of strange voices he was inexperienced, and thought to get rid of this one as one gets rid of an importunate beggar, by passing him without notice.

"I've looked everywhere," he said.

"Not everywhere," clucked the voice in correction.

"Everywhere," he repeated, firmly. "And there's nothing. The old man has left no money, no bank-books, no sign of investment, stocks, or shares. What did he live upon?"

"Me," said the voice.

Jocelyn started again. His nerves, he said to himself, must be getting shaky.

"He seems to have had no 'affairs' of any kind; no solicitors, no engagements; nothing but the letting of the Grange. How on earth did he——" Here he stopped, for fear of being answered by that extraordinary echo in his ear. He heard a cluck-cluck as if the reply was ready, but was checked at the moment of utterance.

"All his bills paid regularly, nothing owing, not even a tailor's bill running, and the money in his desk exactly the amount, and no more, required for his funeral. Fancy leaving just enough for your funeral! Seems like a practical joke on your lawful heir. Nothing in the world except that old barn." He sat down again and meditated.

The deceased was his uncle, the chief of the old house, the owner and possessor of the Grange. He left, it is true, a formal will behind him, in which he devised everything of which he was possessed to his nephew Jocelyn, who inherited the Grange and the park besides the title. Unfortunately, he did not specify his possessions, so that when the young man came to look into his inheritance, he knew not how great or how small it was. Now, when one knows nothing, one expects a great deal, which accounts for the buoyancy of human youth and the high spirits of the infant pig.

He began with an unsystematic yet anxious examination of the old man's desks and papers. They were left in very good order; the letters, none of which were of the least importance, were all folded, endorsed, and dated; the receipts—all for bills which would never be disputed—were pasted in books; the diaries, which contained the record of daily expenditure and the chronicle of small-beer, stood before him in a long uniform row of black cloth volumes. Even the dinner-cards were preserved, and the play-bills: a most methodical old gentleman. But this made it the more surprising that there could not be found among all these papers any which referred to his private affairs and his personal property.

"He must have placed," said Jocelyn, "all the documents concerning his invested moneys in the hands of some solicitor. I have only got to find his address."

He then proceeded to examine slowly and methodically the

drawers, shelves, cupboards, recesses, cabinets, boxes, cases, receptacles, trunks, and portmanteaus in the chambers, turning them inside out and upside down, shaking them, banging them, peering and prying, carefully feeling the linings, lifting lids, sounding pockets, and trying locks, until he was quite satisfied that he had left no place untried. Yet he found nothing. This was surprising as well as disappointing. For although of late years old Sir Jocelyn's habits had been retired and even penurious, it was well known that in early manhood, that is to say, somewhere in the twenties and the thirties, he was about town in a very large and generous sense indeed. He must, at that time, have had a great deal of money. Had he lost it? Yet something must have remained. Else, how could he live? And at least there must be some record of the remnant. Yet, strange to say, not even a bank-book. Jocelyn thought over this day by day. He had taken up his abode in the chambers, which were comfortable, though the furniture was old and shabby. The rent, which was high, was paid by the Grange, now let to a family of Americans of the same surname as his own, who wanted to say they had lived in an old English country-house, and would go home and declare that it was the real original cradle of their race. Cradles of race, like family trees, can be ordered or hired of the cabinet-maker, either in Wardour Street or the College of Heralds. The old man *must* have had something besides the family house. If it was only an annuity, there would be the papers to show it. Where were those papers?

This search among the drawers and shelves and desks took him several days. It was upon the second day that he heard the voice. On the fifth day, which was Saturday, he began with the books on the shelves—there were not many. First he looked behind them: nothing there: he remembered to have heard that sometimes wills, deeds, and other proofs of property have been hidden in the leaves of the Family Bible: there was no Family Bible, but there was a great quantity of novels, and Jocelyn spent a long afternoon turning over the leaves of these volumes in search of some paper which would give him a clue to his inheritance. He might just as well have spent it squaring the circle, or extracting the square root of minus one, or pursuing a metaphysical research, for all the good it did him. It is only fair to the young man to say that he would have greatly preferred spending the time in lawn-tennis, and especially in playing that game at a place which was adorned with the gracious presence of a certain young lady. "A Foreign Office clerk," said Jocelyn bitterly; "a mere Foreign Office clerk is good enough to dance with. She has danced with me for a year and a half. The other fellow can't dance. But when that clerk becomes the owner of a tumble-down Grange, though there are not twenty acres of ground belonging to it, and, besides, gets all the property of old Sir Jocelyn, whom all the world knows, and inherits his

title, that Foreign Office clerk becomes, if you please, a person of consideration, as the other fellows shall see. But where the devil *is* the property?"

"Property!" It was the same curious echo, in his ear, of that metallic clucking voice. Remember that it was Saturday afternoon, when the streets are full; this made such a phenomenon as a voice proceeding from empty space all the more striking and terrible. Much more terrible was the thing which next occurred. You know how in thought-reading the medium takes your hand, and without your guidance moves slowly, but certainly, in the direction of the spot where you have hidden the ring. The phenomenon has been witnessed by hundreds; it is a fact which cannot be disputed. What happened to Jocelyn was exactly of the same kind, and therefore not more surprising. An invisible force—call it not a hand—an invisible, impalpable, strange electrical force seized his hand with a kind of grasp. It was not a strong grasp; quite the contrary. The pressure was varying, flickering, inconstant, uncertain. At the very first manifestation and perception of it, Sir Jocelyn's knees knocked themselves together, his hair stood on end, his moustache went out of curl, and, to use a favourite and very feeling expression of the last century, his jaws stuck. By this feeble pressure or hand-grasp, the young man was pulled, or rather guided gently across the room to a table on which stood, with its doors open, a large Japanese cabinet. It was one of the things with two doors, behind which are two rows of drawers, and below the doors one large drawer. He had already examined every one of the drawers on the first day of the search, when he had opened and looked into all the desks, drawers, boxes, and cupboards in the chambers. He knew what was in the drawers—a collection of letters, chiefly from ladies, written to his uncle and preserved by him. Was it possible that he had overlooked something? He opened all the drawers, turned out their contents, and proceeded to examine every letter. This took him two or three hours, during the whole of which time he had an uncomfortable feeling as if his forefinger were being gently but steadily pulled. At last he threw down the last letter and let himself go, just as a man who is blindfolded and yet finds a hidden object, allows himself to be led by the unconscious guide straight to the place where it has been deposited. Guided by this unknown force, he found himself grasping the lowest drawer—the large one—which he had already pulled out. What did it mean? He turned it round: there was nothing remarkable about the drawer: an empty drawer cannot contain a secret. Surprising: his fingers seemed pulled about in all directions—what was it? By this time, the first natural terror was gone, but his pulse beat fast; he was excited; he was clearly on the eve of making some strange discovery.

He examined the drawer again, and more carefully. He could see nothing strange about. Then he heard again that curious voice which seemed in his own head, and it said "Measure."

What was he to measure? If Jocelyn had been a conjuror he would have understood at once: he would even have guessed: the professor of legerdemain is a master in all kinds of craft and subtlety—I knew one of them who, though passionately fond of whist, would never play the game on account of the temptation in dealing to give himself all the thirteen trumps—but above all he understood the value of drawers, compartments, divisions, and recesses which are shorter than they seem. The drawer was in fact only three-fourths the depth of the cabinet. When Jocelyn at length realized this fact, he perceived that there must be a secret compartment at the back, where no doubt something was hidden which it greatly concerned him to find out. Of course by this time he accepted without further doubt the fact that unusual forces—call them forces—were abroad. "A psychic influence," said Jocelyn, though his teeth chattered, "of a rare and most curious description." The communication of it to the Society established as a Refuge for the stories which nobody outside it will believe, would be very interesting: but perhaps it was his uncle who thus—here another impatient jerk of his finger startled him. He turned the cabinet round: the back presented a plain surface of wood without any possible scope for the operation of secret springs; the side was carved with little round knobs in relief. He measured the drawer with the side of the cabinet: there was a difference of three and a half inches, and the drawer was three inches high: as the cabinet was two feet broad, this gave a space of $3 \times 24 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$, which represents 252 cubic inches. A good deal may be hidden away in 252 cubic inches. How was he to get at the contents? Anyone can take a hammer and chisel and brutally burst open a cabinet, whether of Japanese or any other work. It did strike Jocelyn that perhaps with the poker he might prise the thing open. But then, so beautiful a cabinet, and his late uncle's favourite depository for the love-letters of a life spent wholly in making love—'twould be barbarous. While he considered, the forefinger of his right hand was travelling slowly over the knobs. Presently it stopped, and Jocelyn felt upon the knuckle a distinct tap. He pressed the knob; to his astonishment a kind of door flew open. Jocelyn looked in—there *was* something! At this moment he paused. He did not doubt that the treasure, whatever it was, would prove of the greatest, the very greatest importance to him, perhaps title-deeds, perhaps debentures, perhaps notes of investments, perhaps the address of the solicitors in whose hands Sir Jocelyn, his uncle, had placed his affairs, perhaps—but here he tilted up the cabinet, not daring, through some terror of the supernatural, as if a spirit who could bite might be lurking in the recess, to put in his hand, and the contents fell out without any apparent supernatural assistance, by the natural law of gravity. We may take it as a general rule in all occurrences of the supernatural kind, that the ordinary machinery provided by nature and already explained by Sir Isaac Newton and

others, is employed wherever it is possible. In cases where direct interference of another kind is required, no doubt it is always forthcoming. No ghost or spirit would hesitate, of course, to go through closed doors, pass parcels through walls, and so forth; but if the doors are open the plain way is clearly and obviously the easiest and best. So that, if a thing will fall from a receptacle of its own accord when that receptacle is inverted, there is really no necessity at all for the assistance of psychic force. This explains why the parcel fell out.

It was wrapped in an old discoloured linen covering. Jocelyn unfolded it with trembling fingers. It contained a cap. Odd; only a cap. It was made of cloth, thick, such as is used for a fez, and formerly no doubt red, but the colour was almost gone out of it, and it was moth-eaten. In shape it was not unlike a Phrygian cap. Round the lower part there ran an edging, an inch broad, of gold embroidery, but this too was ragged and, in places, falling off. There was also a lining of silk, but it was so ragged and worn that it looked as if at a single touch it would fall out.

"A worn-out, old, decrepit cap," said Jocelyn. "All this fuss about a worthless cap!"

Just then his little finger received a tap; and Jocelyn, his attention thus directed to the spot, saw a folded paper beneath the cap.

"Ah!" he cried, "this is what I have been looking for. But a cap! I never heard my uncle talk about a cap."

He took up the paper, and yet he could not choose but look at the cap itself. As he gazed upon it, he felt himself turning giddy. Cabinet, cap, and paper swam before his eyes. "It is nothing," he murmured, "the heat of the room—the—the——"

"Effendi!" said the voice he knew, metallic and yet quavering. "Excellency! it is—*me*—your servant."

The cap was transformed—it was now of a brilliant hue, while its gold embroideries were fresh and glittering—it no longer lay upon a table, decrepit and falling to pieces, but it now covered the head of a little old man, apparently about eighty or more, so wrinkled and lined was his visage. He seemed feeble, and his knees and shoulders were bent, but his eyes were bright. He was dressed in some Oriental garb, the like of which Jocelyn had never seen.

He bowed, in Oriental style with gesture of the fingers. "I am," he said, "the Slave of the Cap. I am a Jinn, and I am at his Excellency's service, night and day, to perform his wishes so long as he possesses the Cap."

"And at what price?" asked Jocelyn.

"At none. The Effendi's ancestor paid the charges: fees are not allowed to be taken by assistants. Sorcerers and great Effendis like his Excellency are particularly requested to observe this rule."

"Certainly," said Jocelyn. "If there is to be no signing of bonds and terms of years——"

"Nothing, your Excellency, nothing of the kind."

"In that case——" here the faintness came over him again and his eyes swam. When he recovered he looked about him for his Oriental servant. There was no one there, only the furniture in the room and the cabinet, and beside the cabinet the worn and faded cap.

"I think I must be going off my head," said Jocelyn. "I wish I had a glass of water." As he spoke he saw that a glass of water actually stood on the table at his elbow. He took it and was going to drink it. "Faugh!" he cried, setting it down hastily, "it has had flowers in it."

Then he remembered the roll of paper—which he opened. It was a letter on two sheets, addressed to himself by his uncle; but the second sheet had been twisted, and apparently used as a light, for it was partly burned, and had been rolled out again and placed with the unburned sheet as if the writer had been hurried.

"MY DEAR NEPHEW," it said,—"I have deferred until a late—perhaps the last moment, writing to you. I have long felt that you are ardently desirous of ascertaining what I have and what I should leave to you. In the first place, there is the Grange. You can always, I should think, let that very old and picturesque building for a sum which will give you the rent of your chambers, pay your club subscriptions and your dinners. You have, besides, your clerkship, which ought to pay your tailor's bill. I do not advise you as regards the conduct of your life. My own, it is true, has been chiefly guided by the precepts of the great and good Lord Chesterfield: but I refrain from pressing my example upon you.

"There is, however, a very curious family possession which I am able to leave you. I am sure you will value it highly, if only on account of its history. It has been in the possession of the chief of our race for five hundred and fifty years and more. Sir Jocelyn de Haultegresse, your ancestor, being one of the later Crusaders under Richard Cœur de Lion, received it for some friendly services, the nature of which is unknown, from his noble and learned friend, the Saracen Sorcerer, Ali Ibn Yûssûf, commonly called Khanjar ed Dîn, or the Ox Goad of Religion. This invaluable cap confers on its possessor the power of having whatever he wishes for. Armed with this talisman, and being all, like myself, men of moderate ambitions, anxious chiefly to get through life as pleasantly as possible, we have not incurred odium by amassing broad lands and great possessions. I bequeath, therefore, to you this cap, in the hope that you will use it with moderation. Ponder carefully before expressing a desire, even in your own mind, the effect of making a wish which will be construed into an order. I must also give you a word of warning. I have observed for some time, to my

great regret"—here the page was partly and irregularly burned—"to my very great regret . . . on many occasions to carry out my wishes promptly . . . desirable to exercise modera . . . no excuse for other than prompt . . . not fall to pieces, or there may be alleged some pretext for crying off . . . ments have long been lost, and it might be difficult in court of law to recover . . . Well, my nephew, this talisman kept me in luxury for sixty years; perhaps it may yet . . . regain, so to speak, its old tone. At least, I hope so.

"Your affect . . ."

"By Jove!" said Jocelyn.

He might have gone on to ask if anybody had ever seen the like, or if one could have expected it, or if one was really living in an age when such things are discredited. But he did not. He only said "By Jove!" and looked about the room, and at the cap, and at the letter, with bewildered eyes. At last he understood the meaning of this very plain letter. He pushed back his chair and sprang to his feet, crying, "Christopher Columbus! I've got a Wishing Cap!"

II.

He stood looking at the faded old cap. The thing fascinated him; the gold embroidery flickered, and seemed to send out sparks and tiny gleams of fire. The rusty stuff glowed and became ruddy again. *Could* the thing be true? But his uncle was a sober man and a truthful; his narrative had nothing wild or enthusiastic about it.

"My ancestor, Sir Jocelyn de Haultegresse," the young man repeated. "Yes; the one who lies with crossed legs in the old church. I wish I knew how he got the cap."

His eyes fell upon a picture. Why, he had seen that picture a hundred times, and never thought what it might mean, or if it had any meaning at all. It hung, among others, on the wall, and represented a Crusader in full armour conversing with a Moslem. The former was a young man; the latter was old, with a long grey beard—an old man who looked impossibly wise.

They were not only conversing, but Jocelyn heard what they were saying.

"I understand, Venerable Ox Goad of Religion," said the Christian, "that with this thing in my possession I can ask for and obtain anything I want."

"Anything in reason," replied Khanjar ed Dîn. "You cannot, for instance, walk dry-shod from Palestine to Dover, but you can sail in safety through a storm."

"And not be sea-sick?"

"Certainly not, if you command it."

"Suppose, for instance—a valiant knight would not ask such a thing—but suppose, for illustration, one were to ask for—say the

absence of the enemy when one lands, eh?—terror of the enemy at one's approach—flight of the enemy when one charges—safety when the arrows are rattling about one's armour—eh?"

"All these things," replied the wise man, "you can command and ensure."

"Ha!" Sir Jocelyn smiled. "It rejoices me," he said piously, "that I came a-crusading. All Christendom—ay! and Islam too—shall ring with my prowess."

"Certainly," replied the Sage, "if you wish it."

"Can one also command the constancy of one's mistress?"

The magician hesitated.

"You can command it," he said. "But I know not the Frankish ladies. Perhaps they will not obey even the Slave of the Cap."

"One more question," said Sir Jocelyn. "In my country they have a trick of burning those—even if they be knights, crusaders, and pious pilgrims—burning and roasting, I say, at slow fires those who become magicians, wizards, sorcerers, and those who employ the services of a devil."

"Keep your secret," said the wizard. "Let no one know. And, that none may guess it, let your desires be moderate. Farewell, Sir Jocelyn."

The conversation ceased, but the picture remained. Pictures, in fact, last longer than conversations.

"This is truly wonderful," said Jocelyn.

He threw open the windows and looked into the street. Below him, in Piccadilly, was the crowd of the early London season: the carriages and cabs rolled along the road; on the other side the trees were in their early foliage. It seemed impossible, in the very heart and centre of modern civilization and luxury, that such things as he had heard and witnessed should have happened. Yet, when he looked round the room again, there was the Cap, there was his uncle's letter, and there the picture of Sir Jocelyn's bargain. What had he given this Eastern wizard for a power so tremendous?

Then the young man began to reflect upon the history of his House. They had for generations lived in the ease and affluence of English country gentlefolk: they had never, so far as he knew, turned out a spendthrift: they had not fooled away their small estate: they had neither distinguished nor disgraced themselves: in fact, there was no reason why they should try to distinguish themselves: they had all they wanted, because they could command it. Knowledge? they had the royal road to it: art—skill—strength? they had only to wish for it. Wealth? they could command it. Why, then, should they seek to show themselves better, more clever, stronger, or wiser than their fellows? It would have cost an infinity of trouble, and for no good end; because if they succeeded, how much better off would they have been? The knowledge of this secret made him understand his ancestors. As they had been, so should he be. Except for one thing. The four

last baronets were unmarried ; in each case the title descended to a nephew. As for himself—and here he murmured softly, "Eleanor"—and choked. Suppose you had set your heart wholly upon one thing, and that thing seemed impossible of attainment, so that the future loomed before you as dull and as grey as noontide at a foggy Christmas : and then suppose the clouds lifted, the sun shining, and that glorious, that beautiful Thing actually within your grasp. Anyone, under these circumstances, would choke.

He returned to the table and contemplated the Cap, wondering if the Attendant of the Cap were actually at his elbow.

"It might be awkward," he said, "to wake at night and remember that the dev— I mean Monsieur the Jinn, the Minister of the Cap, was sitting beside one on the pillow. Would he come to church with one, I wonder? And would he be offended with remarks about him?" He half expected some reply, but there was none.

"He was a very old fellow to look at," he went on. "But in these cases age goes for nothing. I suppose he doesn't know, himself, how old he is ; as for the Cap, I wish it were a trifle less shabby."

Wonderful to relate, a curious change came over the faded cloth. It looked bright again, and the gold embroidery smartened up ; not to look fresh, but a good many years younger.

"Sun came out," said Sir Jocelyn, trying not to be too credulous. Then he thought he would test the powers of the Cap, as mathematicians test a theory, namely, with elementary cases. "I wish," he said, "that my hat was new." Why, as he looked at his hat it suddenly struck him that it was not so very shabby after all : a mirror-like polish has a got-up look about it. This hat was one which had evidently been worn for a week or two, but was still quite good enough to be worn in the Park or anywhere.

"My gloves"—he stopped because, without formulating the wish in words, he instantly became aware that his gloves were by no means so bad as they had seemed a moment before. Not new certainly : but what is so horrid as a pair of brand-new gloves? He had overrated the faults of his gloves. They were an excellent pair of gloves, just worn long enough to make them fit the fingers, and not make them look like glove-stretchers ; the glove should look made for the fingers, in fact, not the fingers for the glove. To be sure, the gloves on the table were not those he had in his mind ; and, in fact, he could not remember exactly how he came by those gloves. Later on, he discovered that he had taken up a wrong pair at the Club.

He sat down to argue out this matter in his own mind. All young men try to do this : when they come to realize that "arguing out" leads to hopeless fogging, they give it up. Very few middle-aged men argue out a thing ; mathematicians, sometimes ; logicians, never ; the intellectual ladies who contribute arguments on the

intellect of the domestic cat to the *Spectator*, frequently. But the result is always more fog.

A Wishing Cap, at this enlightened period, is absurd.

But tables turn, furniture dances, men are "levitated," thought is read, and there is a Psychical Society, with Fellows of Trinity and Doctors of Letters at the head of it. Nothing, at any time, is absurd.

What evidence had he for the miraculous powers of the Cap?

First, the word of his uncle, a most truthful and honourable gentleman. Next, the picture. Thirdly, the two remarkable Visions he had himself received. Fourthly, the gloves and the hat. Lastly, any further evidence the Cap itself might afford him.

By this time he was hopelessly fogged. He began to remember Will, Magnetic Force, Psychic fluid, and all the tags of the spiritualistic folk. These phrases are like spectres which come with fog and mist.

Sir Jocelyn was then sensible enough to perceive that he had argued the matter thoroughly out. After all, there is nothing like experiment, especially, as the conjurers say, under "test conditions," that is to say, where collusion, connivance, fraud, and deception of any kind are impossible. I have seen at a fair, under "test conditions," a plum-cake made in a gentleman's hat, and the hat none the worse.

He lit a cigarette and tried to think of other things unconnected with a Wishing Cap. And first he reflected that, although it is bad to be a penniless Foreign Office clerk, with no other recommendation than that of being heir to a Baronet reputed well off, it is worse to have succeeded to the title and to have discovered that there is no money after all. "Hang it!" cried Jocelyn, "there might have been something. I do wish my uncle had left me something—even a single sixpence!" As he spoke a small coin, a sixpence in fact, tumbled out of a forgotten hole in his waistcoat pocket and fell clinking on the floor. At this point Jocelyn gave way to temper. "Damn the waistcoat!" he cried, and at the same moment dropped his cigarette and burnt an irreclaimable hole in the light stuff of which the waistcoat was made.

Then he conceived a strange idea, a kind of trap to catch a demon, or at least to prove him. He leaned his elbows on the table and addressed the Cap.

"You are a poor old moth-eaten thing," he said. "That, so far as I know, you may have been when the Ox Goad of Religion gave you to my ancestor, Sir Jocelyn the Valiant. Now, you give me a test of your powers in a simple and unmistakable way. I am tired of the uniform London dinner. Cause me to have an entirely new dinner. There!" He expected some movement on the part of the Cap: a nod or inclination at least. Nothing of the kind. The Cap remained perfectly still.

"A note for you, sir," said the servant, bringing him a letter.

It was from a man named Annesley, a friend of Jocelyn's, who had rooms in Sackville Street.

"If by any lucky chance," it said, "you are disengaged this evening, come here. The experiment in *menus* we have talked of comes off to-night. Courtland has been called away, so we must have it now or perhaps never."

Yes, there had been talk about variety in *menus*. Annesley, a man of invention and ideas, had promised something, vaguely. Well, he would go: he answered the note to that effect.

"I suppose," he said to the Cap, "that you have got something to do with this. I wished for a new kind of dinner, and here is one: on the other hand, Annesley hasn't got a Cap, and I suppose he arranged his *menu* without reference to you. I will now give you another chance. I am going into the Park. I wish to meet the Stauntons. Do you know who the Stauntons are? Find out! Yah! You and your sixpence!"

In spite of his bluster, he was rapidly acquiring confidence in his Cap. Before going out, he carefully placed it, with his uncle's letter, in the secret drawer, which he closed. Then he looked at the picture of his ancestor and the Syrian magician.

"Venerable Ox Goad of Religion!" he said, imitating his great ancestor, "can I command, in truth, all that I desire?"

It seemed as if a voice spoke in answer, but whose voice, or whence it came, he knew not.

"Command!"

Jocelyn heard it and shuddered. Then he took his hat and gloves, and hurried forth.

III.

When Jocelyn wished to meet the Stauntons, he should have explained that he wished to meet Nelly, or Eleanor Staunton. This might have saved him a good deal of annoyance. For, first there were Connie Staunton, the actress, and her sister Linda, both of the Gaiety. He met them, driving in a victoria, and heard two young gentlemen, as they lifted their hats, murmur their names in accents of idolatrous emotion.

"You are a fool," said Jocelyn, addressing the Cap. Then there came rolling along a great yellow chariot, with an old lady and still older gentleman in it.

"That," said one of two girls who were standing beside the railing, "that is Lady Staunton and Sir George—our Hemmer is her lady's-maid. She's a kind old thing.'

"This is ridiculous," said Jocelyn. Yet he was pleased to observe the activity of his new servant. Two sets of Stauntons already, though not yet the right set. "I mean the Howard Stauntons."

It was before him, slowly advancing with the throng. He could see the backs of two heads and the parasol of a third. Mrs. Staun-

ton and Caroline, and—yes—Nelly! Hers was the parasol. He would walk on and meet them when they turned.

He was conscious that he was regarded with no great favour by the young lady's mamma. Still, he was now a Baronet, with a place in the country, and an income, counting his clerkship, of—— Well—was it quite six hundred pounds a year? There was also the Cap, but of that he could say nothing. Yet, oh! the joy of wishing beautiful dresses for Nelly, when Nelly should be his own!

There were two daughters: Caroline, the elder, was now seven-and-twenty years of age, and in her ninth season. As she was beautiful, accomplished, clever, and rich (by reason of a bequest from a rich uncle), it was to all women a most surprising thing that she did not marry. Men, who understand these things better, were not surprised. Her beauty was after the fine old Roman style, and accompanied by a more than classical coldness. She was an advocate of Woman's Rights, an ardent politician, a student of logic, learned in many ways, but she was not, apparently, a devotee of Venus. That goddess loves her worshippers to be soft-eyed, smiling, caressing, lively, willing to be pleased and anxious to please. Caroline was chiefly anxious to be heard. There was also some talk about an early affair which ended badly. Some girls harden after such a disaster. Still, there was no doubt that Caroline desired to convert men into listeners. Of the opposite school was Nelly—younger than her sister by seven good solid years. Not so beautiful—in fact, with irregular features—she was singularly taking, by reason principally of her sympathetic nature. She had no opinions at all of her own, but she was on the other hand very ready to hear those of other people, especially those of young men. That woman is certain to go far who thoroughly understands that young men—indeed, men of all ages—delight in nothing so much as to talk confidentially with women, and especially young women, about themselves. Many a most excellent chance has been lost through not observing and acting upon this principle. Nelly, her mother was resolved, should not be thrown away. As for Jocelyn, he had nothing, and she had nothing: therefore any little tenderness which might arise on the girl's side should be instantly nipped in the bud. A resolute mother, when assisted by an elder daughter, is altogether too powerful for a detrimental. Therefore Jocelyn got next to no chances, and worshipped at a distance and sadly. Whether Nelly ever understood the meaning of his melancholy I know not. Meantime, the young man lost no opportunity of meeting the object of his hopeless passion, though he too often fell into the hands of the elder sister, who made him sit down and hear her opinions. Now, however, he repeated, he was a Baronet, and he had—he had a Wishing Cap.

"I wish they would go slower," he said. There was a block at Prince's Gate, and the whole line was stopped.

"Thank you," said Jocelyn. In another moment he would have

reached the carriage, when—oh!—he groaned deeply—as there met him the greatest bore of his acquaintance, a long-winded bore, a cheerful bore, a bore who laughs, a bore who tells very pointless stories, a bore at the sight of whom men fly, plead engagements, and for their sake break up clubs. This creature seized Jocelyn by the button, and told him how he had landed a good thing. And the block was removed and the carriages went on again. At last he broke away, still keeping the Stauntons in sight. But there was another diversion. This time it was a slight carriage accident, but as it happened to friends of his own he could not in common decency pass on without tendering his assistance. Once more he got away, and saw the Stauntons' carriage slowly making its way to the turning at Albert Gate. Then was his last chance: the crowd was thick, but he forced his way through, and was prepared with a ready smile just before the carriage turned homewards. In fact, he had already executed a beautiful bow before he perceived that the vehicle was empty. The ladies had got out without his seeing them. He turned, discomfited, and went home to dress for dinner.

While dressing, in a pretty bad temper, he began to "argue it out" again. Why, after all, he had got his wishes in the most remarkable manner. About the reality of his power there could be no doubt. He had wished for water: it was at his elbow. No doubt, if he had said drinking-water, the Cap would not have brought water in which flowers had been standing for a week. He had wished for a new hat, and his hat suddenly blossomed into such glossiness as is acquired by a *coup de fer* at the hatter's; for new gloves, and his gloves became—not new certainly, but newish. He had foolishly wished that his uncle had left him the smallest coin, and there was a sixpence; he had wished for a new and original dinner, and there had come Annesley's invitation; he had wished to see the Stauntons, and he had seen them.

It was with a feeling of great elation that he went to the dinner. Anybody would feel elated at the acquisition of such a strange and wonderful power.

"You shall have," said Annesley, as if he had actually heard Jocelyn's wish, "you shall have something perfectly new and original for dinner. It is an experiment which will, I think, please you."

The table was laid with the exquisite attractiveness and skill which belonged to all of Annesley's entertainments. He was a young man who had ideas and a considerable fortune to carry them out with. Life is only really interesting when one has both ideas and a fortune. As for Courtland, he was a critic. Not a failure in art and letters, but a critic born: one of the men who are critics of everything, from a picture to a slice of bread and cheese, and from Château-Lafitte to bitter beer.

"I see," said Annesley, with a gratified smile, "I see, my dear

fellow, that you are surprised at seeing oysters. It is not the season for oysters, certainly," yet there were six on each man's plate. "But these are Chinese sun-dried oysters. They came to me by a singular chance, in a state resembling shrivelled rags. You put them into salt water for an hour or two, and then, as you observe, they turn out as plump and as fresh as natives. By the Chinese they are esteemed a great delicacy."

Jocelyn tasted one, though with misgiving. Probably he did not share the Chinese opinion of sun-dried oysters, for he turned pale, gasped, and hastily drank a glass of lacryma, which had been chosen by Annesley to accompany the oysters. The other man, observing the effect of the sun-dried oysters upon Jocelyn, prudently abstained from tasting them at all, but began a stream of conversation, under cover of which the oysters got carried away, while Annesley's delight in his experiment prevented him from observing its failure. Indeed, he went on to talk with complacent assurance of the foolish and ignorant prejudices with which many admirable forms of food are regarded.

"I shall proceed," he said, "to give you presently a remarkable illustration of this." Jocelyn shuddered. "Meantime, here is a soup which I can highly recommend; it is a *purée* of cuttle-fish."

It really was an excellent soup, could Jocelyn have rid himself of the horrible imagination of a *pulpe* flinging hideous gelatinous arms about from the middle of the plate, and fixing its suckers on the hand that grasped the spoon.

"The cuttle-fish," said Annesley, who, besides being a man of ideas, was also somewhat of a prig, "the cuttle-fish, which is the actual type of the legendary Kraken—though, by the way, the Kraken is not so very legendary, since the great Squid——"

"That will do, Annesley," said Courtland. "We know all about the Squid. Fellow wrote a book about him. Model at the Fisheries."

"The cuttle-fish," continued Annesley, "is a much maligned creature. Not more so, however, than the fish which Williams is now putting on the table—the dog-fish."

"Oh! I say!" cried Jocelyn.

"Dog-fish," said Courtland. "Beasts when alive. Take all your bait. Fishermen roll 'em up and scrub the gunwale with 'em. Think it will encourage the others."

"My pet fisherman," said Jocelyn, "used to do that till I begged him not to. He told me, I remember, that some people eat them."

"Did he eat them himself?" asked Courtland.

"No, he did not."

"Cooked like this," interrupted Annesley, with a reassuring smile, "he would have eaten them with enthusiasm. They are stuffed with tinned shrimps."

"Lead poisoning," Courtland murmured in his beard.

The two guests, however, struggled manfully with the dog-fish.

With it, Annesley insisted, must be taken Catalan wine. Little was done with either. Nor was the next course, which consisted of iced potatoes with mulled Moselle, much more successful. It was one of Annesley's whims to find for each course its one peculiar drink: thus with the edible fungus he gave iced negus; and though he provided a sufficiency of dry champagne, he begged his guests so pathetically to try his fancies, that they could not refuse. Long before the unnatural dinner came to an end, all three were excited by the mixture of drinks and the correspondingly small supply of food. By the time when the curried kingfishers—a rare and *recherché* dish—arrived, they were tired of talking about *cuisine*, and were arguing hotly, especially Courtland and Annesley, about things of which they knew nothing: as the proper method of riding a steeplechase—a thing which none of them had ever tried; the locality of "Swells' Corner" at Eton—all three had been at Harrow—and so forth. At last, Jocelyn, weary of the babble, and perhaps more than a little cross with the terrible failure of the dinner, cried out, "Oh, don't let us wrangle in this way! I wish we had a little harmony!"

He had hardly spoken when a German band, brazen beyond all belief, broke out at the end of Sackville Street, and a piano-organ below their window.

"This is the work"—Jocelyn banged his fist upon the table—"of my ancestor's amazing fool of a devil!"

The others stopped and looked at him. They only half heard the words, but Jocelyn hastily fled.

Everything had gone wrong—the dinner more than anything else. A terrible thought struck him. Could his devil by any chance have gone stupid, or was he inattentive? And, if the latter, how to correct him? Suppose, for instance, Ariel had refused to obey Prospero, and his master had no spells to compel obedience! Now this seemed exactly Jocelyn's case. He sat down and took a cigar. "The dinner," he said, "was the most infernal mess ever set before a man. I've taken too much wine, and mixed it; and I've eaten next to nothing. To-morrow morning I shall have a very self-assertive head; and all through that fool of a Cap." He remembered, however, that he had as yet asked nothing serious of the Cap, and went to bed hopeful.

IV.

Perhaps the wine he had taken made Jocelyn sleep, in spite of the many and exciting adventures of the day, without thinking of the Cap, or being disturbed by the thought of the invisible servant who sat beside his pillow. In the morning, which happened to be Sunday, he did think of the Cap when he awoke, but with a sleepy

comfortable satisfaction in having got what promised to be a good thing. It was eight o'clock. "Too early to get up," he said; "wish I could go to sleep again."

His eyes instantly closed. When he awoke again it was eleven, and he proceeded to get up. It would be wrong to say that he did not think about the Cap; in fact, his mind was brimful of it; but Jocelyn was not one of those who work themselves up to an agony point of nervousness because they cannot understand a thing. On the contrary, once having realized that the thing *was*—an unmistakable and undeniable fact—he was ready to accept it, a thing as difficult to understand as the law of attraction.

"Heigho!" he said; "I wish I was dressed."

He then perceived that he had already put on his socks, though he couldn't remember having done so. And, besides, you cannot tub in your socks: so he had to take them off again. He wished for nothing more while he was dressing except once, and that at a most unlucky moment: it was in the process of shaving. He was thinking of the battles round Suakin, and his young heart, like that of his crusading ancestor, glowed within him. "I wish," he said, with enthusiasm, "that I had a chance of shedding my blood for my country." He forgot that his razor was at that moment executing its functions upon his chin: there was an awful gash—and an interval of ten minutes for temper and court-plaister.

He then began to comprehend that, with an attendant ready to carry out every wish, it is as well not to wish for things that you do not want. But no one knows, save those who have had a similar experience, how many things are wished for, carelessly and without thought. Jocelyn had to learn the lesson of prudence by many more accidents.

When his landlady, for instance, brought him his breakfast, she began, being a garrulous old creature, to talk about old Sir Jocelyn and the flight of time, and what she remembered; and presently mentioned, casually, that it was her birthday.

"Indeed!" said Jocelyn, with effusion; "then, Mrs. Watts, I wish you many happy returns of the day and all such anniversaries."

He accompanied the wish with a substantial gift, but was hardly prepared, when the good woman's daughter came up to clear away, to hear that it was also the anniversary of her wedding-day. In fact, in a short time the housekeeper's anniversaries rained, and all of them demanded recognition. Like the clerk who accounted for absence three times in one year by the funeral of his mother, so this good lady multiplied her own birthdays and those of her children as long as their announcement drew half-a-crown from her lodger. After breakfast, Jocelyn prepared to sally forth. He could not find his umbrella. "Devil take the thing!" he cried impatiently. It is to the credit of the Cap that the umbrella has never since been found. Therefore the wish was granted, and the devil did take the

umbrella. Jocelyn *says* that he must have left it at the Club, but he *knows* otherwise.

He knew the church where the Stauntons had sittings, and he proposed to meet them as they came out, and to walk in the gardens with them—perhaps to have luncheon with them. Nelly would be there, he knew, in the sweetest of early summer costumes—an ethereal creature made up of smiles, bright eyes, flowers, and airy colour. She would smile upon him; but then, hang it! she would smile upon another fellow just as sweetly. Would the time come, he thought, when she would promise to smile on no one but himself? Could one ever grow tired of her smiles? Caroline would be there, too, much more beautifully dressed, cold, superior, and ready to lecture. Fancy marrying Caroline! But as for Nelly—"Oh!" he sighed, thinking of his empty lockers; "I do wish I had some money!"

He instantly felt something hard in his pocket. It was a shabby old leather purse full of money. He took out the contents and counted the money: three pounds, fourteen shillings, ninepence and a farthing in coppers. Jocelyn sat down, bewildered.

"It's the Cap!" he said. "I wished for money. The fool of a Cap brings me three pounds fourteen shillings and ninepence-farthing!" He threw the purse into the fireplace. "What can you do with three pounds fourteen and ninepence-farthing? It would not do much more than buy a bonnet for Nelly."

Yet he remembered it *was* money. If he could get, any time he wished, just such a sum, he could get on. Almost mechanically he made a little calculation. Three pounds fourteen shillings and ninepence-farthing every half-hour, or say only ten times a day, comes to thirty-seven pounds seven shillings and eightpence-halfpenny; that, multiplied by three hundred and sixty-five, comes to £13,477 8s. 10½d. "It is," said Jocelyn, "a very respectable income."

He hesitated, being, in fact, a little afraid of testing his new power. Then he said boldly, "I want more money."

There was a click among the coins on the table. Jocelyn counted them again. He found another sixpence and a halfpenny more than he had at first observed.

"The Cap," he said, "is a fool."

He remembered the advice given by the Ox Goad of Religion to the first Sir Jocelyn to exercise moderation. The reason for that advice, however, existed no longer. He would not now be burnt if all the bishops and clergy of the Established Church knew to a man that he had such a Cap. On the contrary, it would be regarded as a very interesting fact, and useful for religion in many ways. He must try, however, he said, to instruct his servant in larger ideas. No doubt, in the latter days of his uncle, the tendency to moderate or even penurious ways had been suffered to grow and to develop. It must be checked. Money must be had, and in

amounts worth naming. Three pounds odd! and then sixpence-halfpenny!

He met his friends coming out of church—Nelly, as he expected, as sweet as a rose in June; Caroline, perhaps, more resembling a full-blown dahlia. He walked through the Park to their house in Craven Gardens; Nelly, however, walked with her mother and Annesley, who also happened to be on the spot, while he walked with Caroline, who developed at some length the newest ideas in natural selection. He was asked to luncheon, and sat beside Caroline, who continued her discourse, while Nelly and Annesley were talking all kinds of delightful and frivolous things. After luncheon Caroline said that, as Sir Jocelyn took so much interest in these things, she would show him some papers on the subject which contained her ideas. She did; and the afternoon passed like a bad dream, with the vision of an unattainable Nelly at the other end of the room, as a mirage in the desert shows springs and wells to the thirsty traveller. He might have wished, but he was afraid. He could not trust his Cap: something horrible might be done; something stupid would certainly be done. The servant might be zealous, but as yet he had not shown that he was intelligent.

He came away melancholy.

"My dear," said Mrs. Staunton to Caroline, when he had gone, "Sir Jocelyn seems to improve. He is quiet and—well—amenable, I should say. He comes of a good family, and his title is as old as a baronetcy can be. There is, I know, a place in the country, but I am told there is no money. The last baronet spent it all."

Caroline reflected.

"If a woman must marry," she said, "and, perhaps, as things are, it is better that she should for her own independence—a docile husband with a good social position—— But perhaps he is not thinking of such a thing at all."

"My dear, he comes here constantly. It is not for Nelly, who cannot afford to marry a poor man. Therefore——"

She was silent, and Caroline made no reply. There comes a time even to the coldest of women, when the married condition appears desirable in some respects. She had not always been the coldest of women, and now the thought of a possible wooer brought back to her mind that memory of a former lover in the days when she, alas! was as poor as her sister Nelly. A warm flush came upon her cheek, and her eye softened, as she thought of the brave boy who loved her when she was eighteen, and he one-and-twenty; and how they had to part. He was gone. But things might have been so different.

"I shall meet them again on Wednesday," Sir Jocelyn thought. "They are going to Lady Hambledon's. If that Cap of mine has any power at all, it shall be brought into use on that evening. I must have—let me see—first of all, opportunity of speaking to her; next, I suppose, I can ask for eloquence, or persuasive power—the

opportunity must not be thrown away. And she must be well-disposed—do you hear?" he addressed the invisible servant. "No fooling on Wednesday, or——" He left the consequences to the imagination of his menial, perhaps because he did not himself quite see his way to producing any consequences. What are you to do, in fact, with an invisible, impalpable servant—the laws of whose being you know not—whom you cannot kick, or discharge, or cut down in wages, or anything?

In the evening a thing happened which helped to confirm him in the reality of his Cap, and at the same time made him distrustful of himself as well as of his slave.

It was rather late, in fact about twelve o'clock. Jocelyn was walking quietly home from the Club along the safest thoroughfare in Europe—at least the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department said so. They used to call it the Detective Department, but changed the name because nothing was ever detected, and the term investigation does not imply the arrival at any practical result. There were still a few passengers in the street. One of them, a shambling, miserable-looking creature, besought alms of Jocelyn, who gave him something, and then fell a-moralizing on the mysteries of the criminal and pauper class in London. "That man," he said to himself, "is, I suppose, a vagrant; a person without any visible means of existence. Fill him with beef and beer, or gin, and he will become pot-valiant enough to think of obtaining more of such things by force or fraud instead of by begging. Then he will become one of the dangerous class. Poor beggar! I wish I could do something to help one of these poor wretches." Immediately afterwards, he heard the sound of personal altercation. Two men, both in overcoats and evening dress, were struggling together, and one of them raised the cry of "Police!" Then there was the sound of a well-planted blow, and one of the men broke away and ran as hard as he could towards Jocelyn. The other man, knocked for the moment out of time, quickly gathered himself together and ran in pursuit. Jocelyn, by instinct, tried to stop the first man, who, by a dexterous trip-up with his foot, flung him straight into the arms of the second, his pursuer. He, somewhat groggy with the blow he had received, collared Jocelyn, and rolled over with him.

"I give him in charge," he cried, as a policeman came up. "I give him in charge—robbery with violence."

"But, my dear sir," explained Jocelyn, "it is a mistake. You have got the wrong man."

"Dessay," said the policeman. "You can explain that little matter at the station, where you are a-going to."

"Little matter?" repeated the man who had been robbed. "You call it a little matter to be robbed of watch and chain in Piccadilly, by a fellow who asks you for a light to his cigar, and then plants as neat a left-hander between your eyes as you can——"

"Why!" cried Jocelyn. "It's Annesley!"

It was.

"Well," said the policeman, when he understood, and ceased to suspect: "as for him, he's got safe enough off, this journey. And as for you, sir," he addressed Jocelyn, "you couldn't have done a better turn to that fellow—I know who he is—than to let him chuck you into the other gentleman's arms."

Again Jocelyn had obtained the wish of his heart. He had, thanks to the Cap, done something to help one of "these poor wretches."

V.

JOCELYN reserved his final trial of his power for Wednesday evening. Meanwhile, he thought he would let the Cap rest. But one thing happened which troubled him greatly. His housekeeper's daughter—she was a girl of fourteen or so, all knuckles and elbows—brought up his breakfast, crying.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Please, Sir Jocelyn, mother's had a terrible loss."

"What has she lost?"

"She's lost her purse, Sir Jocelyn, sir, with three pound fourteen and ninepence farthing in it. I don't know what we *shall* do. And I've lost my lucky sixpence. And Bobby, he's lost his ha'penny."

Jocelyn turned crimson with wrath and shame. His housekeeper's purse! The girl's lucky sixpence! And the child's halfpenny! His Jinn had placed them all in his pocket!

"I am very sorry," he stammered. "As for the purse, I can't restore—I mean—find that for you. But—have you looked everywhere?"

"Oh, everywhere, sir."

"Look here, Eliza. Here are four pounds,"—he would have handed over the exact sum, but he remembered in time that the lucky sixpence was among the coins in his pocket, and would certainly be identified—"here are four sovereigns. Tell your mother to buy herself a new purse, and if she loses her money again, I shall not find it for her. Turn your lucky sixpence into a shilling, and Bobby's halfpenny into a sixpence."

When she was gone he pulled out the Cap, and set it before him on the table. "You are a common thief," he said, shaking his forefinger. "You are so lazy that, when I ask for money, you go to the housekeeper's room and steal—steal her purse. You are a disgraceful sneak and thief. Another such action, and I will——" here he remembered that he wanted the services of the Cap for Wednesday, and said no more. But he was profoundly disgusted. If money could only be had by stealing, how could he accept any money at all? Then he reflected. There is so much money and no more in the world. All this money has owners. The owners do not part with their money except as pay for services done.

How, then, can money be got by any servants of a Wishing Cap except by stealing it? But to steal a poor housekeeper's money! Mean!—mean! Yet for a Baronet to accept money stolen from anybody! Impossible. And so vanished at one blow his income of £13,477 8s. 10½d. The matter opened a large field for inquiry, which he "argued out" as before. That is to say, he got hopelessly fogged over it.

This matter caused him a good deal of annoyance. There were other things, too, which made him suspect the power, or the intelligence, of the Cap. Thus, it was vexatious, when he had merely wished, as so many well-meaning people do sometimes wish, that he was able to send to certain cases of distress, coals or help in other ways, to be told by the housekeeper that the ton of coals he had ordered was come, "and please, here is the bill." He paid it silently. Again, he was in his dressing-room, thinking of Nelly Staunton. "The case is as hopeless," he said to himself, "as if seas divided us. I wish," he added gloomily, "seas did divide us." Was it by accident, or was it by the meddlesome and mistaken action of the Cap—he always called it the Cap, to avoid the somewhat invidious phrase, Slave, or Demon of the Cap—that at this moment he kicked over the can containing his bath water, and made, of course, a great and horrible pool? He sat down and considered. As for the ton of coals, he had ordered them; but then they came at the very moment when he was wishing that he *had* coals to send. He had himself kicked over the can; but then, could it have been zeal on the part of the Cap to carry out, however imperfectly, even impossible orders?

On the Monday evening he met a lot of people who had all at some time or other gone in for spiritualistic business. This was indeed their bond of union. After dinner a good many wonderful stories were told, and there was talk about Volition, Magnetism, Clairvoyance, and the like.

"I am sometimes interested," said a lady, who was present, one of those who believe everything, "in the old stories about Slaves of the Lamp, the Ring, or the Jewel. They seem to me illustrative of the supreme power which the Will of man has been known to achieve in rare cases; that, namely, when he can command even senseless matter and make it obey him."

"As, for instance," said Jocelyn, waking up, for this seemed likely to interest him, "if I was to order this glass to be upset. Pardon me, but I did not ask Mr. Andersen to upset it."

Yet it was upset. Mr. Andersen, one of the guests, had at that moment knocked it over.

"That, certainly," observed the lady, "would be an exercise of Will of a very singular and remarkable kind. It belongs to the class of phenomena which the Orientals accounted for by the invention of their so-called Slaves. Solomon had such Slaves. Mohammed had them. Every great man had them."

"Do you think," asked Jocelyn anxiously, "that they exist now?"

"The Slaves? Certainly not." This lady, it is evident, knew a great deal. "But the power—yes—oh yes!—that exists if we can attain to it." She was a woman about thirty years of age, with large full eyes. "If I choose to exercise my Will, Sir Jocelyn, you will advance towards me whether you like it or not."

"I very much doubt that: but," said Jocelyn recklessly, "if *I* choose to exercise my Will, you shall recede from me."

"Really!" said the lady scornfully; "we will try, if you please. My Will against your Will. You shall advance, but I will not recede."

No one had ever before suspected young Sir Jocelyn of any pretence at supernatural powers, so that they all laughed, and expected instant discomfiture. Yet a remarkable thing happened. The lady sat in a chair before him, and Jocelyn fixed his eyes upon hers, which met his with a dilated glare. He did not advance, but presently the lady's chair began to move backward, very slowly. She sprang up with a shriek of affright, and the chair fell over.

"What have you done?" she cried. "Some one was pulling the chair."

"Very clever indeed," observed a man who was addicted to feats of legerdemain and deception. "Very clever, Sir Jocelyn; you have deceived even me. But you will not do it twice, otherwise I shall find out how you did it."

"No," he replied, half ashamed, "not twice. A trick," he added, "ought not to be done over again."

"A trick?" said the lady. "But no—that was no trick. If the chair were not actually pulled, why, you must have the power, Sir Jocelyn. Yes: you have the Will that causes even inanimate matter to move. It was not me, but the chair that you repelled."

He deprecated, modestly, the possession of so strong a Will. The story, however, without the names, has been preserved, and may be read among the papers of the Psychical Society. It is one of their choicest and best authenticated anecdotes. But the real simple truth is not known to them, and in revealing it one does but set the narrative, so to speak, upon a different platform. It is no longer a mysterious Will but a mysterious Agent.

"It is a long time," observed the Mr. Andersen who had upset the glass—he was a bright and sprightly Americanised Dane—"it is a long time since I did busy myself with the secrets and mysteries of the unseen world; but, if you please, I will give you, of the final result at which I arrived, an account."

"You did get a result, then?" said the lady of the strong Will.

"You shall hear. I was out camping one night; all the fellows had gone to sleep except me, and I was keeping watch by the camp-fire with my six-shooter, and the big dog for company. The sky above us was as clear and pure as a young maiden's heart, and the

tall trees stood up against the sky like sentinels, dark and steadfast, and the whole air was as still—as still as a fellow keeps when he wants to see if the other fellow will copper a queen or not. But I fell to thinking and thinking; and there was some one far away that I wanted so much to see and to know what . . . that person —might be thinking and doing——"

"And you saw her!" cried the lady.

"I remembered," he went on, not regarding the interruption, "how the fellow who taught us the mesmeric passes told me what an ever so strong mesmeric power I possessed, and I thought that here, if ever, was a high old time to try that power. I looked round at the still sky, and the quiet trees, and the sleeping fellows, and I just began to wish. Then the big dog lifted up his head and made as though he'd like to give a howl, and he looked at my face, and it seemed as if he believed he'd best swallow that howl. The more he didn't howl the more I wished; and I wished and I wished and I wished till it seemed as if the whole world was standing still to judge how wonderful I was wishing, and then there came a faint rustle, way off among the tops of the trees, and I thought there was something, maybe, beginning to come out of it all. And I wished and I wished and I wished. And——" here he paused in a manner which thrilled his hearers.

"Well?" asked Jocelyn, giving voice to the general expectation.

"And, by Jupiter, Sir Jocelyn," said the narrator, "by Jupiter, nothing never came of it!"

VI.

Before going to the ball at Lady Hambledon's, Jocelyn took the most careful precautions to prevent any possible mistake. He put the Cap before him and lectured it solemnly.

"Now, you understand, there is to be no fooling this evening. I am going to Lady Hambledon's—don't confound her with any other Hambledon—Lady Hambledon in Brook Street; the Stauntons are going to be there: you will arrange an opportunity for me to speak to—the young lady; you will do your best to—to stimulate—to give me a shove if I get stuck; you will also, if that is possible, predispose the young lady in my favour. I don't think there is anything more you can do. See that, this evening at least, you make no blunders. Remember the housekeeper's purse." By this time he had learned to avoid the phrase "I wish" as most dangerous and misleading, when a servant of limited intellect interprets every wish literally.

He went off, however, comforted with the conviction that really he had said all that was necessary to say. If this Cap, or the Slave of the Cap, was not a fool and an imbecile, his orders would be executed to the letter. He was a little excited, of course; any-

body would have been so under the circumstances. Not only was his happiness at stake—at five-and-twenty one's whole future happiness is very often at stake—but he was about to test and prove the power of the Cap. Hitherto that power had not been exercised to his advantage in anyway. He should now ascertain exactly whether he was going to be a real wizard, or quite a common person like other young Baronets. On the stairs he overheard a whispered conversation which made him feel uneasy.

"I saw the Stauntons go up just now," said one.

"And I saw Annesley go up just before them," said another. "Everybody says that he is hard hit. Came here after her, of course."

Nothing absolutely to connect Annesley with Nelly. Yet he was uneasy. Certainly, Annesley would not be hard hit by Caroline. Two people full of ideas cannot marry and be happy. No, it must be Nelly. He fortified himself with the thought of his Cap, and went on upstairs.

The first thing he saw was Nelly herself, dancing with Annesley. "Confound him!" said Jocelyn. "He is as graceful as an ostrich!" On the other side of the room sat Mrs. Staunton. To her he made his way, and reached her just at the moment when Caroline was brought back to the same spot by her partner in the last dance. He could do nothing less than ask Caroline for the valse which had just begun. She was disengaged.

At this juncture there fell upon him the strangest feeling possible. It was exactly as if he was being guided. He felt as if some one were leading him, and he seemed to hear a whisper saying, "Everything is arranged according to your Excellency's commands." The consciousness of supernatural presence in a London ball-room is a very strange thing. There is an incongruity in it: it makes one act and feel as if in a dream. It was in a waking dream that Jocelyn performed that dance. Presently—he was not in the least surprised now, whatever should happen—he found himself sitting in the conservatory with Caroline. She was discoursing in a broad philosophical spirit on the futility of human hopes and opportunities.

Then he heard his own voice asking her: "What is the use of opportunities unless one knows how to use them?"

"What indeed?" replied Caroline; "but surely, Sir Jocelyn, it is only the weaker sort to whom that happens? The strong"—here she directed an encouraging glance at him—"can always use, and can even make, if need be, their opportunities."

"Yes:" Jocelyn forced the conversation a step lower, "but if a girl won't give a fellow a chance."

"I think," said Caroline, "that any man can find his chance, if he likes to seize it."

There was a pause—Jocelyn felt himself impelled to speak. It was as if some one was pushing him towards a precipice. When

he afterwards thought of himself and his extraordinary behaviour at this moment, he could only account for it by the theory that he was compelled to speak and to conduct himself in this wonderful way. "You must have seen," he whispered, "you must have seen all this time, that I have been hoping for a chance, and was unable to get one. There was always your mother or your sister in the way. And I did hope—I mean—I did think that the Cap—I mean that I did rather fancy that one might perhaps get a chance here, though it isn't exactly what I ordered and wished. But I can't help it. In fact, I made up my mind last Sunday that it must be to-night or never. But what with the crush, and seeing other fellows cut in—Annesley and the others——"

Caroline interrupted this incoherent speech, which, however, could have but one meaning. "This is not the only place or the only time in the world."

"Well," said Jocelyn, "may I call to-morrow? But then—oh! this isn't what I wanted—may I call——" his eyes wandered, and he began a kind of love-babble, yet with a look of bewilderment.

Caroline listened calmly. She remembered another love-scene years before, when much the same kind of thing was said to her, though her lover then had a far different expression in his eyes. They were burning eyes, and terrified her. Jocelyn's were bewildered eyes, and made her feel just a little contemptuous. Even the coldest women like some fierceness in their wooer.

"Hush!" she said, "you will be overheard. Take me now back to mamma. We are going immediately. You may come to-morrow at five."

He pressed her hand, and took her back. Nelly was with her mother, Annesley in attendance. She glanced at her sister, and caught in reply a smile so full of meaning, that she did not hesitate to bestow a look upon Jocelyn of the sweetest sympathy. Her pretty eyes and this sympathetic look of sisterly—yes! sisterly—pleasure, completed the business. It wanted nothing but Nelly's sympathy to round off the situation and fill up his cup of misery.

Then they went away. Jocelyn retired to a comparatively secluded place on the landing, and there, leaning against a door, he began to curse his fate and his folly. He was so absorbed in railing at fortune and in self-pity, that he absolutely forgot the very existence of the Cap. The situation was too desperate; in a lesser stress of circumstances he would have remembered it; but as yet he did not even connect the Cap with the present fearful disaster, of which the worst was that it could not possibly be worse; it was hopeless; he had told a girl to whom he was utterly indifferent, that he was in love with her; without being drunk, or blinded for a space by her charms, he had addressed words to her which he had intended for her sister. "Oh," he groaned, "I wish I were somehow, anyhow, out of this horrible situation!"

As he spoke, he involuntarily straightened his legs and leaned

back with a jerk. The door opened, and he fell back with a fearful crash of broken glass upon the back stairs and a tray of ices on the way to the tea-room.

Unlucky Jocelyn! To fall downstairs backwards is at best undignified, but who can describe the indignity and discomfort of falling in such circumstances as this? He was helped to his feet by some of the servants, and slipped away as quickly as he could.

The cool night air restored him a little; he found himself able to think coherently: and he now understood that the whole of this miserable evening's work was due to his infernal Cap.

He took it out of the cabinet as soon as he reached his chambers. "You fool! you beast! you blind, blundering blockhead!" he thus addressed the Cap. "It is all your doing. The wrong girl? Yes: of course it was the wrong girl. Didn't give you her name? You ought to have known it. Girl you talked so long with?"—All this time he seemed to be hearing and answering excuses. "Talked so long with——" He sank in a chair and groaned. Alas! it was his own fault: he had forgotten to name the girl; the Slave of the Cap knew that he wanted one of the Stauntons, and supposed that he wanted the one with whom he had conversed so much on Sunday. How should he know?

He mixed a glass of whisky and seltzer.

"I wish," he said desperately, "that the stuff would poison me."

He drank off half the tumbler. Heavens! it was methylated spirit, not seltzer (the bottles were alike in shape), that he had poured into the whisky. His wish was very nearly gratified. Fortunately the quantity he had drunk proved the cause of his safety. Over the bad quarter of an hour which followed let us drop the veil of pity.

But he was to have another and as rude a lesson in the activity of his slave. He awoke in the middle of the night, with a sort of nightmare, in which Caroline was lecturing him and saying, "I am to be your companion all your life. You will never cease listening to the voice of instruction." The weight of his horrible blunder became intolerable to him. He threw off the clothes and sat up in the bed. "I wish," he gasped, "I wish I was dead." Something seized him by the throat. He could not breathe. He sprang from the bed and rushed to the window for air. He was choking. He battled with the fit, or whatever it was, which held him for three or four minutes and left him purple in the face and trembling in the limbs.

"It is spasmodic asthma," he said, when he had recovered a little. "My father had it, and his father had it. I knew it would come some day." At the same time, it was odd that it should come just when he was wishing to be dead. And the constriction of the pipes did seem astonishingly like the fingers of some one trying to throttle him.

VII.

"DEAR SIR JOCELYN" (it was a note from Mrs. Staunton),—"I shall be very glad to see you to-day at twelve. Caroline tells me you have something *important*—may I guess what it is?—to say to me.—Yours very sincerely,

"JULIA STAUNTON."

Jocelyn received this note with the cup of tea which he took in bed, according to vicious morning usage. He read it and groaned. It meant, this harmless note, nothing short of a life-long lecture from a female philosopher; and he a perfectly frivolous young man!

He fell back upon his pillow and groaned. Then he foolishly began to wish, forgetting his Cap. "I wish the confounded letter could be washed out of existence," he said; and with an impatient gesture threw out his arms and upset the cup of tea over the paper. It would take ten minutes to get another cup. "It's that accursed Cap," he said; "it always takes one up wrong. I've a good mind to burn it." He dressed himself in the vilest temper. Had he heard the conversation at that moment going on between Caroline and her mother, he would have been more angry still.

"I do not pretend," said the young lady, "to feel any violent attachment for him—that kind of thing is over for me. There was a time, as you know——"

"My dear," said her mother, "that is so long ago, and you were so very young, and it was before your uncle died."

"Yes, it is so long ago," said Caroline; "I am seven-and-twenty now—two years older than Jocelyn. Poor boy! he is weak, but I think I shall have a docile husband; unless, to be sure, he turns stubborn, as weak men sometimes do. In that case——" Her face hardened, and her mother felt that if Caroline's husband should prove stubborn, there would be a game of "Pull devil, pull baker."

There was, Jocelyn felt, no way out of it at all, unless the way of flight, which is always open to everybody. And then, what a tremendous fool he would seem! As for the truth, it could not possibly be told. That, at any rate, must be concealed; and at this point he began to understand some of the inconveniences, besides that of being misunderstood, in keeping a private demon. It is not, nowadays, that you would be burned if it were found out. Quite the contrary: all the clergymen in the world would be delighted at finding an argument so irrefragable against atheists and rationalists. The thing was wrong, of course, but beautifully opportune. But it would be so supremely ridiculous. A Slave of the Cap, Jinn, or Afreet, who could only find his master money by stealing the housekeeper's purse; who interpreted a wish, without

the least regard to consequences, literally and blindly; who led his master into the most ridiculous scrapes, even to getting him engaged to the wrong girl: a blundering, stupid slave—this, if you please, would be simply ridiculous. As for Nelly, his chance with her was hopelessly gone, even if, by any accident, he could break off with her sister. Yet, he thought, he should like to know if there was any truth in the report about her and Annesley. "I wish," he said, "I wish, now, that I had never known her."

Then it became apparent to him that he really never had known her at all. She could not suspect his intentions because she had no opportunity of guessing them: and he remembered that though he had known the Stauntons a good while, he had never once got an opportunity of talking with her alone, except at a dance, and then her card was always filled up for the whole time she stayed. Sympathetic eyes are very sweet, but they do not mean an understanding without being told that a man is in love with one. To do Nelly justice, she had never thought of Jocelyn in this way. He was an agreeable young man to dance with; he came to afternoon tea and talked with Caroline, or rather listened; she thought he was not very clever, but he seemed nice.

Mrs. Staunton received Jocelyn with great cordiality. "Let me," she said, "hear at once, my dear Jocelyn, what you wish to say to me." It was a sign of the very worst that she addressed him by his Christian name, without the handle, for the first time.

"Caroline has told me that last night——"

"Yes," said Jocelyn. "I wish she hadn't." The last words *sotto voce.*

"She did not tell me all," replied Mrs. Staunton. "In fact, very little; but I gathered——"

"I told her," said Jocelyn, in a tone most melancholy and even sepulchral—"I told her that I loved her."

"Yes—I gathered so much—and, indeed, I was not surprised. To love my Caroline betrays, as well as becomes, a liberal education. Yet I need not disguise from you, Jocelyn," the young lady's mamma continued, "that from one point of view—the only one, I am bound to confess—the match is undesirable. You are of ancient family; you have rank; you have, I am assured, excellent morals and the best principles; but, my dear boy, you have—pardon me for reminding you of it—so scanty a fortune."

"It is true," Jocelyn said briskly, and plucking up a little hope; "and if you think that obstacle insurmountable—if, I say, Mrs. Staunton, that fact stands in the way—I will at once withdraw." He half rose, as if to withdraw at once.

"It would have been insurmountable in Nelly's case," said Mrs. Staunton, "because my poor Nelly will have but a slender portion. With Caroline the case is different. The dear girl is provided for by her uncle's bequest; and though you will not be really rich, there will be enough. No, Jocelyn, the objection is not insur-

mountable, but I feel it my duty to state its existence and its nature. I want you to understand entirely my feelings. And, in fact, my dear Jocelyn," she gave him her hand, which he pressed, but languidly, "you have my full permission to go on with your suit, and my very best wishes for your success; because I think—nay, I am sure—that you already appreciate Caroline at her true value, and will make her happiness your only study."

Jocelyn murmured something.

"It is not often that two sisters get engaged on the same day," Mrs. Staunton continued, smiling; "yet it will please you to hear that I have this morning already consented to Nelly's engagement with Mr. Annesley."

"With Annesley?" It was true, then. All was indeed over now. Yes: when one is already hopelessly crushed, one more wheel may go over without materially increasing the agony.

"We have not known him long, but he bears, so far as we can learn, as good a character as one can desire. He is an intimate friend of your own, Jocelyn, is he not?"

"He is," said Jocelyn gloomily. "He nearly poisoned me last Saturday."

"That is indeed a proof of sincere friendship," the lady replied, laughing. "He and Nelly have been attached to each other, it seems, for some time, though the foolish couple said nothing to me about it; and at last—— Well, I hope they will be happy. In addition to other advantages, he has a large private income."

"He has, I believe, about four thousand a year. Frillings did it, in Coventry."

"Ye—yes—so many of our best families have made their fortune in trade. We must not think too much of these things. And he certainly has as good a manner as one would expect in an Earl." Then a smile, doubtless at the thought of the four thousand a year, stole over her motherly face. "It is certainly pleasant to think that the dear girl will have everything that a reasonable person can desire. His principles, too, are excellent. And he is, I am assured, a remarkably clever man."

Jocelyn said nothing; he had, in fact, nothing to say, except that all young men with four thousand a year are believed to possess excellent principles.

"And now," she said, "you may go to Caroline. My *dear* boy, why—why did not your uncle, or your father, make money in frillings at Coventry?"

He went to Caroline; but it was with creeping feet, as a schoolboy goes to school, and with hanging head, as that boy goes on his way to certain punishment.

"What on earth am I to say to her?" he thought. "Am I to kiss her? Will she expect me to kiss her? Hang it! I don't want to kiss her. I wish I could kiss Nelly instead."

Just then Nelly herself ran out.

"Oh, Jocelyn!" she said: "you have seen mamma? Of course it is all right. I am so glad! You are going to Caroline?—poor Caroline! You are going to be my brother! I am so glad, and I am so happy—we are all so happy! Did mamma tell you about me as well? Wish me joy, brother Jocelyn!"

"My dear Nelly," he said, with a little sob in his voice—"I suppose I may call you Nelly now, and my dear Nelly as well—I sincerely wish you all the joy that the world has to give."

She put up her face and smiled. He stooped and kissed her forehead.

"Be happy, sister Nelly," he whispered, and left her.

Nelly wondered why there was a tear in his eye. Her own lover certainly had not shed one tear since he first came a-courting; but then men are different.

Caroline was calmly expecting her wooer. She half-rose when he opened the door, and her cheek flushed. She wished the business over.

"Caroline," he said. But he could say no more; his voice and his speech failed him.

"Jocelyn," she replied. And then, because in another moment the situation would have become strained—and, besides, he was a gentleman, and would not give her pain—and, again, if there was any mistake, it was his own folly that had done it—he took both her hands, and drew her gently towards him and kissed her lips, without another word of love or of protestation.

Then he sat beside her, keeping her hand in his, and she began to talk of marriage and its duties, especially the duty of the husband, from a lofty philosophical point of view. It was agreed that she was to have absolute freedom: to take up any opinion, to advocate any cause, that she pleased. At that moment, because she varied a good deal, she was thinking what a splendid field was open to anyone, especially any woman, who would preach Buddhism and the Great Renunciation. She made no allusion at all to her fortune, but Jocelyn perfectly understood that she meant to manage her house in her own way. As for himself, she designed, she said, a career for him. Of course, he would give up the F.O.; and so on. He mildly acquiesced in everything. His own slave had landed him in a slavery worse than anything ever imagined or described. He was to spend his life under the rule of a strong-minded woman of advanced opinions.

VIII.

THEN followed two or three weeks, of which Jocelyn thinks now with a kind of wondering horror. He was expected to be continually in attendance. He was expected to listen diligently. He was even expected to read a great many books, lists of which were prepared for him. Everything, he clearly perceived, was to be

arranged for him. Very well: nothing mattered now. Let things go on in their own way.

The worst of all was the abominably selfish rapture with which Annesley, of whom he now, very naturally, saw a great deal, treated him. The man could talk of nothing but the perfections of Nelly. As poor Jocelyn knew these perfections, and had every opportunity of studying them daily, the words of the accepted suitor went into his heart like a knife. Yet he could not object to listen, or contradict his friend, or show any weariness. To be sure, he might have conversed about Caroline, but it seemed ridiculous. Everybody knew that she was regularly and faultlessly beautiful; everybody also knew that she was strong-minded and held all kinds of views. Besides, he could not trust himself to speak of her. It was bad enough every day to speak with her.

The two weddings were to take place on the same day, which was already fixed for the first week in July. It was arranged where the brides should spend their honeymoon—Caroline and Jocelyn in Germany; Nelly with her bridegroom at the Lakes. Meantime it was impossible not to perceive that Jocelyn, who ought to have been dancing, singing, and laughing, grew daily more silent and melancholy. Caroline, however, either did not or would not see this. Nelly, who did, wondered what it meant, and even taxed Jocelyn with the thing.

"What does it mean?" she said. "You get your heart's desire, and then you hang your head and sit mum. Why, I haven't heard you laugh once since your engagement; and as for your smile, you smile as if you were going to have a tooth out."

"Nonsense!" said Jocelyn. "I suppose men are always quiet when they are most happy."

"Then Jack"—this was Annesley—"must be miserable indeed, for he is always laughing and singing and making a noise. Come, Jocelyn, tell me all about it. Are you in debt?"

"No."

"Are you—have you——" She blushed but insisted, "have you got any kind of previous engagement? Oh! I know young men sometimes entangle themselves foolishly"—what a wise Nelly!—"and then have trouble in breaking off."

"It isn't that, Nelly. It really is nothing."

"Then laugh and hold up your head. Or I will pinch you: I will indeed. You are going to marry Caroline, who is the most beautiful girl in London and the cleverest; and you go about as if you wanted to sit in a corner and cry."

Jocelyn obeyed her, and laughed as cheerfully as a starving clown. When he went home, however, it was with a stern resolve. He would have it out with the Cap.

In taking it out of the cabinet, however, he took with it his uncle's letter and read it again. The latter part he read with new understanding: "moderation" "failure to comprehend;" "want

of obedience." Yes, there was something wrong with this Slave of the Cap. As for the Cap itself, it looked surprisingly shabby—far worse than it had appeared when he first got possession of it.

"Now," he said—the time was midnight, and he was alone in his chamber—"let us understand this." He took the Cap in his hand. "If you can appear to me, Slave or Demon, show yourself to me and answer for your blunders if you can."

The same sensation of faintness which he had before experienced came over him again. When he opened his eyes, he saw before him the same vision of a tottering, battered old creature, with fiery bright eyes.

"I have done my best, Excellency," said the Slave of the Cap, in a tremulous quavering pipe.

"Your best! You have done everything that is stupid, blundering, and feeble. What does it mean? What the devil, I say, does it mean?"

"I beg your Excellency's pardon. If you had mentioned which young lady——"

"Jinn! you knocked me head-over-heels down the back stairs."

"It was the *only* way out of it. You wished to be out of it."

"Slave of the Ox Goad of Religion! you stole the housekeeper's money."

"I have always stolen money for your Excellency's ancestors. You cannot have other people's money without stealing it. This was the nearest money, and I was anxious not to keep your Excellency waiting."

"You have covered me with disappointment and shame."

"I am old, sir. The Cap is falling to pieces. I have slaved for it for five hundred years. After five hundred years of work no Cap is at his best." He looked, indeed, at his very worst, so feeble and tottering was he. "In love matters," he went on, "I am still, however, excellent, as the late Sir Jocelyn always found me. Up to the very last I managed all his affairs for him. If I can do anything for your Excellency now——"

"You have already done enough for me. Stay——" a thought struck Jocelyn. "You would like your liberty."

"Surely, sir."

"You shall have it. I will throw this Cap into the fire—understand that—on one condition: it is that you undo what you have already done. It is by your blundering and stupidity that I have become engaged to Caroline Staunton. Get me out of the engagement. But mind, nothing dishonourable: nothing that will affect her reputation or mine: the thing must be broken off by her, for some good reason of her own, and one which will do neither of us any harm. For my own part, I don't in the least understand how it is to be done. That is your look-out."

"Excellency, it shall be done. It shall be done immediately."

He vanished, and Jocelyn replaced the Cap in the cabinet. It was with anxious heart that he lay down to sleep, nor did sleep come readily. He was quite sure, now, that the engagement would be broken off somehow, but he could not possibly understand how or why. There had been between them no quarrel nor the slightest disagreement—in fact, Jocelyn always agreed to everything: there was nothing, on either side, that was not perfectly well known; nothing, that is, as sometimes happens with young men, which might "come out and have to be explained." How—— But, after all, it was the business of his servant to find out the way. He went asleep.

In the afternoon, next day, a note came to him at the Foreign Office. It was from Caroline, begging him to call upon her as soon as possible.

"I have," she said, "a very important communication to make to you—a confession—an apology if you please. Pray come to me."

He received this strange note with a feeling of the greatest relief. He knew that she was going to release him. Why or with what excuse he neither knew nor cared.

Caroline was in her own room, her study. She gave him her hand with some constraint, and when he would have kissed her, she refused. "No, Jocelyn," she said, "that is all over."

"But—Caroline—why?" A smile of ineffable satisfaction stole over his face which she did not see. He would have been delighted to fall on his knees in order to show the depth of his gratitude. But he refrained and composed himself. At all events he would play the lover to the end, as he had begun. It was due, in fact, to the lady as well as to himself.

"Jocelyn," she said frankly, yet with some confusion in her eyes, "I have made a great mistake. Listen a moment, and forgive me if you can. It is now eight years since a certain man fell in love with me—and I with him. My poor boy! I have never felt—I know it now—towards you as I did towards him. We could not marry because neither of us had any money. And then he went abroad. But he has come back—and—and—I have money now, if he has not—and—oh! Jocelyn—do you understand, now?"

"You have met him"—oh! rare and excellent Slave!—"you have met him, Caroline, and you love each other still." He wanted to dance and jump, but he did not: he spoke slowly, with a face of extraordinary gravity.

"Oh! Jocelyn." Could this be the same Caroline? Why, she was soft-eyed and tearful, her cheeks were glowing, and her lips trembled. "Oh! Jocelyn. Can you forgive me? You loved me, too, poor boy, because you thought me, perhaps, better and wiser than many other women. Better, you see, I am not, though I may be wiser than some."

He gave her his hand.

"Caroline," he said heroically, "what does it matter for me, if only you are happy?"

"Then you do forgive me, Jocelyn? I cannot bear to think that you will break your heart over this—that I am the cause——"

"Forgive you? Caroline, you are much too good for me. I should never have made you happy. As for me——" he gulped a joyful laugh and choked—"as for me, do not think of me. I shall—in time—perhaps. . . Meantime, Caroline, we remain friends."

"Yes—always friends—yes," she replied hurriedly. Then she burst into tears. "I did not know, Jocelyn, I did not know! I thought I had forgotten him, indeed I did."

He lifted her hand and kissed it with reverence. Then he left her, went to the Club, and had a pint of champagne to pull himself together. As for what people said, when it became known, that mattered nothing, because, whatever they said, they did not say openly to him.

It may be mentioned that no alteration was made in the date of the double wedding, only that one of the bridegrooms was changed. It was a beautiful wedding, and nobody noticed Sir Jocelyn, who was up in the gallery, his countenance wreathed with smiles.

When he left Caroline, Jocelyn went back to his chambers and prepared a little ceremony. He first lit the fire; then he took out the Cap and wrapped it in his uncle's letter. Then he solemnly placed both Cap and letter in the flames.

"You are free, my friend," he said. "An old Cap and an old Slave are more trouble than they are worth. Perhaps, now that the Cap is burned, you will recover your youth."

There was no answer or any sign. And now nothing remains to Jocelyn of the family heirloom, except the picture of Sir Jocelyn de Haultegresse and Ali Ibn Yûssûf, otherwise called Khanjar ed Dîn, or the Ox Goad of Religion.

A GLORIOUS FORTUNE.

I.

JOHNNY OF OREGON.

THE road, which is little more than a rough track—in the open parts, during the summer, dust; in the winter, mud—runs at this place through the virgin forest, untouched, for the most part, by axe, and almost untrodden by foot of man. It is a very remote and untrodden track; it has not yet even advanced, like a young ploughboy, to the dignity of corduroy; it runs along slopes of hills and across the valleys between them. When the way is clear of trees, which is not often, one gets a view of the blue Pacific far away in the west; every evening the sun sinks into it, making a glorious double rose of evening in the sky above and the sea beneath. Yet every half-dozen miles or so one may, perhaps—or may not, perhaps—come across a clearing or farm cut out of the solid forest, the stumps of the trees still sticking dolefully out of the ground, and the fields divided and staked out by rough snake-fences. In a few years, when the stumps have quite disappeared, and beautiful green things have grown over the ugly fences, this farm, with its backing of wood and hill, will be as perfectly beautiful as it is now unkempt, ragged, and unsightly.

You never meet anybody walking along this road, for it runs straight up into the hills, where it is presently lost; but in the fields and upon the new farms you may sometimes see a man at work. It is, in fact, on the other side of the Rocky Mountains, which seems a great way off to all except those philosophers who find the world so small; in the land of Oregon, on the borders of the great Pacific, where, as yet, men are scarce.

The most untidy, most uncared-for clearing along this road was one in the wildest and most solitary part of it, high up among the slopes of the hills. It seemed as if the settler had begun with immense energy, stubbing up brushwood, sowing timothy-grass, hewing the fir-trunks, and laying down log-fences, as if he

intended to live a thousand years there, but had then lost heart, and so suffered the weeds to grow, stubbed up no more brushwood, and left his fences unfinished.

The house belonging to the farm was nothing but a little log-cabin, grey-coloured and weather-beaten, with two windows and a door in the middle opening to a narrow stoop or veranda. A little beyond the hut there ran babbling and sparkling in the sun (where it was not overhung with alder, wild-cherry, and syringa), quite the most beautiful little brook in the world. At the back of the house rose steeply a great hill covered with oak, maple, hemlock, and fir: where the trees had been cut down, but the ground not further cleared, there grew every kind of underwood, bush, briar, and climbing-plant; the wild cucumber trailing its long shoots; blackberries as big as English mulberries; huckleberries; thimbleberries; yellow salmon berries; and sweet sal-lal; for this is the country where the King of Berry-land holds his court.

Under the trees, and wherever there is a glade or opening, there are huge ferns: it is a land of greenery and sunshine; a land where everywhere trickling streams make carpets of spongy moss, and the air is soft like unto the air of England. On the right hand, looking east, are the great mountains, and on the left, if you can see it, the broad Pacific.

High up among the hills at this time of year, which is autumn (or else the berries would not be ripe), the farmers and their families camp out—the girls sleeping in tents and the boys in the open; they shoot, fish, gather berries, and make jam—buckets of jam, casks of jam, hogsheads of jam—breathe as sweet and pure an air as there is anywhere in the world (except, of course, Dartmoor, Hexham Common, and the top of Malvern Hill), and presently go home again, ready for the winter's dances, flirtations and sledging and skating and fun. Also on the slopes of those mountains live herdsmen, mostly eremites or solitaries, who doubtless meditate on things holy and spiritual among their cattle; and, just as the holy men of old were continually troubled by devils permitted to assume the forms of men or women—especially the latter—so these herdsmen are hindered in their spiritual musings by bears, grey wolves, and coyotes. And they do not go away in the winter like the campers-out, but abide upon the hills and endure hardness and frost, snow and hail, rain and wind, in their season.

The clearing and cabin of which I speak stood quite alone, and at least ten miles from any other farm. In Europe a man would be afraid to live in so solitary a fashion; in Oregon, loneliness is not so much felt, because there is nothing to be afraid of. Very few of these hermits in log-huts have got anything to lose, and if they had there would be no one to rob them. Wayfarers by day are few and far between; wayfarers by night exist not; while as

for ghosts, phantoms, wraiths, *dames blanches*, and spectres, they belong to old settled places, and have not yet had time to get farther west than New England; and have their origin in what we fondly call the Romance of History, meaning the murders, robberies, piracies, cruelties, tortures, abductions, fratricides, revenges, wraths, and violences of which, in a new country, there have been as yet comparatively few. In the matter of ghosts, the county of Northumberland, little though it be, would, I am convinced, prove a match for the whole of the United States taken together (with Canada thrown in), excepting only Alaska, which is a grisly and a creepy country, and haunted by troops of devils, in honour of whom the belles of Alaska blacken their faces—a thing done in no other country, and a compliment which must be received as at once delicate and unexpected.

It was a warm afternoon in late September; there was a feeling in the air as if, after four months—nay, six—of splendid sunshine, one ought to be satisfied and contented. Even of warmth and clear skies, there cometh satiety in the end, and certain hymns which speak hopefully concerning everlasting sunshine were written by poets imperfectly acquainted with human wants, and ignorant of the tropics. I believe an expurgated edition of the hymn-book has been prepared, in which a Paradise with occasional clouds is dwelt upon, for the use of our equatorial brethren. Nature, in fact, was saying as plainly as she could speak: 'I could now, thank you, enjoy a little coolness, with clouds and rain, in order to turn my green leaves into red, and crimson and gold, for the delight of humans. After that I will trouble you for the customary frost and snow; but all in moderation.' Everybody who can hear the voice of Nature should immediately make haste to be in harmony with her. Then they will be strong and sturdy in the winter; hopeful in the spring, and brimming over with love for everybody, especially for those who are still young and beautiful; in the summer, they will be meditative, drowsy, and slumberous; and in the autumn, whether or no a man wears that blue ribbon about which they make nowadays such a coil, he should feel the vinous mystery of the season, and grow drunk, if only in imagination, upon the fruits and harvest of the year.

There were two men outside that log-hut on the shady-side, which was the front; between them was a table (home-made), on which were cards, tobacco, a pannikin, and a whisky-bottle. One had a chair; the other sat on an empty keg turned bottom upwards. The man on the keg was the squire or owner of the clearing, and lived alone in the hut. A man of five-and-forty, or perhaps fifty, about the middle height, and spare; he wore a long beard, and his hair was long. Both beard and hair were brown, touched with grey; he had regular features, which had been once, probably, handsome, but weak; and blue eyes, which wandered as he spoke, and were unsteady. His fingers were long and delicate;

and somehow at the very first sight of him, one thought that here was a poor, weak creature, whose opinions mattered nothing, and who was perfectly certain never to get on in the world. He had a pipe in his mouth, and continually he turned upon the whisky-bottle eyes of affection.

On the other side of the table sat his companion, a man of much the same height and figure, with eyes of the same colour, only of a darker blue, steadier, not to say keener, in their look; his hair and beard were quite grey: his hands were strong and square; at sight of him the inexperienced, thinking of certain stories, would have said that here was a strong, brave man, one of Nature's noblemen, turned out ready-made, uneducated and ignorant, never, maybe, having read a single book: rude and rough of speech, coarse of manners; yet chivalrous as a true Castilian, honourable as an English gentleman, and as full of noble sentiments and lofty aspirations as the most cultivated Dean.

We know very well, and feel ashamed of it, that such a man cannot be found in this country of ours. He does not grow in the same soil as an enslaving aristocracy, whether of birth, education, genius, or knowledge. This man, then, would have appeared at first sight, and to persons of limited experience and unlimited imagination, a true nobleman of Nature's making. But there were about him certain outward signs and tokens, which spoke volumes to such as had wisdom, and could interpret small facts of evidence, and were not too eager to believe in the perfection of the human race. For instance, among other signs, his hands were white, which, in such a country bodes ill; his eye was restless, his clothes were good: therefore, whenever wise (and therefore suspicious) persons met this man, or any like unto him, they would edge away from him, avoid him, and whisper to each other such words as "sportsman," "gang," "sharper," "cheat and rogue," or their equivalents, whether in Bostonian, Virginian, Kentuckian, Californian, or Oregonese: pleasant languages, every one, full of local colouring, and all remarkably like modern English.

This man had a cigar in his mouth, and sat on a chair—the only chair—tilted up against the door-posts. His feet were on the table; it is a graceful, easy, convenient, well-bred attitude, and was based by the original inventor on consideration for the comfort of others.

"Go on, Johnny," he said encouragingly. Note, that when one man calls another, without first asking his Christian name, Johnny, this single fact saves the historian whole pages of character-drawing. Many a novel of "analysis of character" would vanish altogether if the hero were at the outset simply named Johnny. But then that novel would never get written. Pity; but then, again, perhaps no one ever wanted it to be written. And, again, when one man, not knowing another man's Christian or surname, addresses that man, from the outset, as Colonel, that also is a fact which speaks volumes.

"I was talking, Colonel," replied the other, "about the old days, and my wife and the little one, wasn't I?" he asked with some doubt, as if he might have been talking state politics, and had, perhaps, forgotten the thread of his argument.

"You never talk about anything else, Johnny," said the man in the chair.

"Why, no, Colonel—p'r'aps not. You see, mate, when you've been four years and more mostly alone, and a stranger comes along and stays a week, you naturally talk about what's in your mind; don't you now? I don't know who you are, Colonel, nor where you come from, but you're good company, and I thank you for staying. Make it another week."

"Go on, Johnny! Don't get drunk till the evening, or I shall have no one to play poker with." For Johnny's hand was wandering feebly and tentatively in the direction of the bottle.

"The little maid must be growing a tall girl now," Johnny went on. "It is nigh twenty years since I saw her last, and then she was only a babe of four months. Quite a tall girl she must be growing—almost a woman now."

"Almost, indeed!"

"A surprising baby she was, with a beautiful voice already. I was sorry to come away for her sake, I remember."

"What did you do, Johnny?" The Colonel asked this question without the least hesitation or apology, though it is a most improper and embarrassing question to put anywhere in America or Australia to a gentleman of European birth and slender luck. "What did you do, Johnny?"

"Nothing," replied the other man.

"Nothing? Not any little difficulty with accounts or trust-money—eh?"

"No," he said, not at all offended by an insinuation which would have made some sensitive brothers wince and kick. "No; I was always for straight ways."

"Drink, I suppose?"

"Not in those days, Colonel. I've only been used to drink since I came to the Land o' Freedom."

"What did you come over for, then?"

"Well, it's a strange story. Some wouldn't believe it. You see, I had a wife."

"So you've told me before."

"Yes, I was married. Why I got married the Lord knows; but I did. And I had a berth in a good House at three quid a week—more than ever I've had since. We lived at Hackney Wick then. Quite a nice house we had, with two sittin'-rooms and three bedrooms, furnished and genteel; and for a bit my Matilda—that was her name—was as contented a woman as you'd come across, in spite of my ridiculous Christian name."

"What was your Christian name?"

"Never mind, Colonel. That hasn't come across the Atlantic, at any rate. It was a beast of a name. The boys at school made nicknames out of it; they called me the Lord Mayor and his lordship and—never mind. The clerks in the House found it out, and made my life miserable about it. A man ought to be able to bring an action against his godfathers and godmothers for libel; but I suppose the lawyers would get all the money, because it would have to be done under age. Don't you worry about my Christian name, because you won't learn it. My Christian name! When I came away, it was a comfort to think that I'd left that behind. The boys have had their fun out of me over here, you bet, because I won't shoot nor fight; but they never found that out. No, no!"

"Well, go on; one may just as well listen to your story as go to sleep. Go on, Johnny."

"We got on very well for a spell—about a year and a half it was—Matilda happy and contented, and feeling quite the lady. We had two seats in a pew at church, and the clergyman called more than once. And then a dreadful misfortune happened, though we thought it was grandeur. For Matilda's younger sister, P'leena, did a great deal better than herself, and married into carriage company and the wholesale line, at Hornsey. After that, nothing went well, and every time her sister P'leena drove over to call on Matilda—which was oftener than was necessary between married sisters, and meant display—in her own carriage, Matilda turned yellow, and had to go to bed. Then nothing would do but I must have ambition. I must rise—I must soar; she threw in my teeth, as if it were a disgrace, that I was only a clerk. Why not a clerk? My father was a clerk; so was hers; so were her cousins, and her brothers, and her friends; so were all mine. She ought to have thought of it before she married me. I didn't want to soar. I wanted my pipe of an evening, and be left alone; soaring would have made me uncomfortable. The nagging, especially the day after P'leena had called, was more than I could bear. So I came away, and I think I've made my fortune and done pretty well, at last." His eye ran slowly round his weedy fields, and unfinished fences, and at last rested lovingly upon the whisky-bottle. "Pretty well—though I had a good spell of waiting."

"You call this pretty well, do you? Then, Johnny, you are easily pleased."

"This is a sweet spot, Colonel, for a man to rest in; there's a pig or two in the sty, there's a barrel of pork in the house; there's plenty of game and birds on the hills; there's oats and grass to be traded for whisky and things. As for the wife, she's gone, and the little maid don't feel she wanted me, and I'd be ungrateful to up and cut sticks and leave this place. Besides, it fell into my hands providential—quite providential, which a man should think upon."

"How did it fall into your hands?"

"This way it was. I was going along, four years ago, alone and

down on my luck, as, in those days, I generally was. Suddenly, at the turn of the road, I came upon this very clearin', and on this same identical house. The door was open, and I walked in. No one in the house, but a whisky-bottle on the table, so that I took a drink. Then I went out and looked around. Presently, I saw, lyin' under a tree, a dead man. He was quite dead; but he hadn't been dead very long, and must ha' dropped, bein' neither knifed nor shot. First, I buried him under that tree there; yes, that's his grave; then I stayed here; then I came to feel as if I'd inherited the shanty and the clearin', the pigs and the oats. If there had been any money," he added slowly, "I should have inherited that as well; but there was not any. No, there was no money, Colonel."

"Did anybody ever accuse you of murdering that man, Johnny?"

"Nobody."

"Lucky for you." The Colonel yawned. "And now I suppose you mean to stay till you send in your checks?"

"I think that is so," he replied, looking about him contentedly. The sun was sloping westward now, and the hills and forests were lying in a splendid golden bath. "Why should I move on? What could I get anywhere better than this? I am boss. I've never been boss before. I get up when I like, I work no harder than I like. Before, I had to work as it pleased other people; here I work for myself: all the wages are my own. As for company, I don't want any but my own, seeing that most of the company in this country is fighting and quarrelling, and screechin' mad with drink."

"Don't you want to see your wife and daughter, then?"

"As for my wife, I shall see her quite soon enough, because, I tell you, she's dead: therefore there's no hurry respecting her. As for my little maid, I should like—yes, I really should like—to set eyes on that child again." He made a determined effort, grasped the whisky-bottle, and resolutely filled half the pannikin, which he drank off. "A beautiful voice she had." His eyes grew softer and weaker, and he rambled in his talk, and began feebly to repeat himself. "Her mother wanted to be proud of her husband, but couldn't, she said, because he was nothing but an insignificant clerk, and contented with that and his low friends. So how could she? Lord! I was always the most contented of men. Give me my pipe, I say, and my drop of beer in the evening, with a talk and a friend or two: what more does any man want? And pay? Why, they would have advanced me to five pounds a week in time; more than ever I've had since she nagged me into running away."

"Then you did pluck up spirit to run away?"

"I did. One evening, when she'd been going on worse than usual, I put on my hat and coat, and wrapped up my throat with a comforter on account of the east wind, and I said, 'Very well, Matilda; I'm off.' That's all I said. 'I'm off, Matilda.' All she said was 'Good-bye' and my Christian name, which she never used but for purposes of nagging."

"So you came away, and left your wife on the parish?"

"No, Colonel; I didn't"—he said this without the least indignation at this charge—"no. Matilda had her own money, left to her and invested in houses. Now she's dead, the little maid has it, no doubt. A hundred and twenty pounds a year the money was. Perhaps it is more by this time."

"Was it settled upon her?"

"Why?" He took another drink out of the pannikin. "Don't I tell you it was her money?"

"What is the wife's is the husband's."

"You wouldn't say that, Colonel, if you'd known Matilda. You wouldn't, indeed."

"Well, you ran away?"

"Yes, I ran away." He laughed gently. "I thought I would surprise Matilda, so I took my passage that same day for New York. When I got there I wrote to Matilda. I said she'd be glad to find her husband was a man of spirit; that I was bound to make my Fortune before I came home again; and I told her where a letter would find me. She replied that she should think the better of me for the future; and as regards the Fortune, I was to send it home bit by bit, as I made it, because she didn't believe, if I knew how to make it, that I had the pluck to keep it.

"I don't think," he went on after a pause, "that any man's Fortune was so slow of coming as mine. I tried it clerking in a store; I tried it as a book-agent, and a bogus auctioneer's help, and a traveller in clocks and reaping-machines, and a conjurer's confederate, and an actor, and a schoolmaster, and Lord knows what. Except a preacher, I think I've been most everything. Just before the Fortune came—I mean this little clearin', and the house—I had the hardest job of all, for I hitched on to a plough gang."

"Yes, I suppose you must have always been a pretty useless galoot. There's lots like you, Johnny."

"Matilda," Johnny went on, heedless of these contemptuous words, "didn't quite know all that happened. No, sir; the letters I sent home would have done credit to Mr. Vanderbilt; for I told her that the dollars were running in so thick 'twas impossible to count them, but I couldn't send them home because they had all to be invested again. She wasn't so grateful for the news as she might have been, wanting all the time to take a better position, as she said: and if I was making all this money, why was she starving on a hundred and twenty pounds a year? Well, poor thing, perhaps she would have found out the truth, because she was threatening to come out after the dollars, but she was taken ill and died—all pure vexation because I wouldn't send any of it home. After that the little maid wrote instead; and I kept on, just to please her, pilin' it up about my Glorious Fortune. But, somehow, what with this unexpected Fortune and the whisky, I've forgotten

to change the post-town and the State, and I guess she must have left off writing."

"So," said the other man, "you've got a daughter at home, and you've done nothing to prevent your showing your face again; and there's money waiting for you, and yet you stay here in this cursed lonely place without a friend"—Johnny embraced the whisky-bottle—"or a man to speak to."

"You've been with me for a week, Colonel," said Johnny.

"And no money——"

"Enough to buy whisky and notions," he interrupted.

"And nothing to expect."

"I expect," said Johnny, "to go on living here for a thousand years. What do I want with change? I've been driven around long enough. Land o' Freedom, is it? I've never come across any freedom. What's it like, your freedom? Show me a bit of it. All I've seen in this country is a boss at one end of a bit of work and a beefsteak at the other. As for you, Colonel, you've had a bally fine time, I guess. Euchre?"

The other nodded.

"Monty?"

He nodded again.

"Poker? I thought so, and a difficulty now and then? Quite so. I thought once of going into the sporting line myself, but I concluded 'twas unwholesome for delicate constitutions. I dare say, Colonel, you've shot your man before now? Yes, I thought so. You look like it. P'r'aps you wouldn't believe it, but I've never even carried a revolver, and never had a fight. Born in England, Colonel? Said so, moment I set eyes on you. In London, most likely. They all come from London. Some trouble, no doubt? Jes' so. As is most often the case, and no need to ask further. For there's more deserves the trouble than gets it, and if the jury was to change place with the prisoner, very often more justice would be done."

Johnny went on rambling in this discursive way, with an occasional sip at the pannikin, his guest paying little heed.

Presently he got up, and said rather thickly that it was close on sunset, and he must go and fix up the supper.

Two or three hours later the two men were within the hut, sitting with the table between them. On the table were a petroleum lamp, the whisky-bottle, and a pack of cards. But unhappily Johnny had over-estimated his strength of head, which now lay on the table among the cards. In other words, he was drunk.

The Colonel, who seemed sober, sat perfectly still. Presently he rose and softly went into the open air. It was a cloudless night; there was a perfect stillness in the air, but the Colonel looked round him with restless and uneasy eyes.

"What is it?" he murmured. "I haven't felt like this for fifteen years or more. Why, I see and feel London again. I am

to give one of them a dinner at the Café Royale. We are going to the theatre afterwards. It is all just as it used to be before the smash. By this time I suppose they have got old, and there's a new lot, but they are exactly like their predecessors, and the old games go on just the same. Oh!" he heaved a long, deep sigh. "But it is without me. I am out of it—for ever."

He sighed again, and began to walk backwards and forwards, swinging his arms and cracking his fingers. He was living over again the old life. The rambling talk of his companion had touched some chord which awakened old memories, and these for the time maddened him. He was at Newmarket, at Doncaster, at Epsom; he was singing and drinking after a great supper; he was gambling at a baccarat-table; he was riding a steeplechase; he was acting with a troupe of amateurs; he was dancing; he was love-making.

"If I had money," he said, "I could go back to all of it. As for the old set, I suppose they are alive. They would welcome anyone back again who had money to go the pace. Even if I had no money," he went on, "I might go home and pretend I had. Lots of men get on without money. Why not?"

For two hours and more he remained outside, while, within the hut, the drunken man still lay asleep, breathing heavily, his head upon the table.

Presently a chill breeze sprang up from the sea, and the dreamer returned to the hut shivering.

"Ugh!" he groaned, looking round the bare planks and comfortless room, his head full of memories of Club-land.

The lamp was burning low; he trimmed it. Then he took a drink from the whisky-pannikin; then he sat down again with the cards and began to shuffle, deal, cut, combine, arrange, and sort the cards with deft fingers, all the time looking an imaginary partner in the face, so that when the game should be finished, the stakes would be handed over to himself without a suspicion or any diminution of confidence. He alone is the perfect sportsman who can always land the money and never be suspected. But there are, alas! few of these.

Presently he got tired of his game of dummy pigeon, and began to think that he was tired, and might as well turn in. Now his host, in offering him hospitality during the last week, had naturally reserved for himself his own bed, giving his guest a shake-down of skins and blankets, and it occurred to the Colonel that, Johnny being so very drunk, he himself might just as well take the bed, which would be easier than the shake-down on the floor. A drunken man does not mind a hard bed.

The bed-place was a kind of bunk, in which blankets were spread on straw. The Colonel began to beat up the straw and arrange the blankets. Now while he was thoughtfully preparing a pillow, a very strange thing happened. At the head of the bed he found a small

recess, contrived, no doubt, by the builder of the house, for a safe receptacle of valuable things. It was, in fact, a secret cupboard; no one would suspect such a thing in a log-hut, and, least of all, at the head of the bed-place. Secret cupboards belong to old manor-houses, granges, baronial halls, and castles, not to wooden cabins in Western States; yet here was such a hiding-place. The Colonel, with considerable curiosity, pulled out the contents and brought them to the table. First, there were three or four little bundles of letters, tied up with string; they were frayed at the edges and soiled, because they had been a good deal carried about in the pocket. The drunken man still lay motionless and sleeping heavily. The Colonel untied the string and turned over the letters. Some were signed "Your affectionate wife." He read two or three of them, and smiled. Johnny, therefore, had told the truth; he had really run away from a nagging wife. He deceived her as to his success in the New World; she nagged him still by letter. The others, of which there were a good many, were written, first in a schoolgirl's unformed hand, but afterwards in a firm round writing, clear and strong. They began "My dear father," and ended "Your affectionate daughter, Milly Montoro."

"So," said the Colonel, "I thought the man was lying. He's a poor helpless creature. Can't even lie. His name is Montoro. How the devil do these clerks and beggars get such names? And his daughter's name is Milly. What is Milly? Emily? Matilda? What's in this bundle? More letters, I suppose."

The last bundle was tied up with the greatest care, and wrapped in an oilskin cloth. The Colonel opened it, and changed colour, turning suddenly quite white; for the bundle was nothing else than a packet of English bank-notes—ten-pound notes, eighty of them—eight hundred pounds! He counted them three times over. Eight hundred pounds!

As he counted them and gazed upon them, his eyes flashed and his lips trembled. Then he thought they might be forged notes. What on earth could a man want with good English notes in a log-cabin? He held them up to the light and examined their edges and looked at the numbers. No; they were good notes.

Then he remembered how the man he called Johnny—the Montoro man—had alluded to money. "If there had been any," he said, "I should have inherited that as well." He could lie, then, after all, this mean creature; and he had lied.

Eight hundred pounds in notes! And still the drunken man lay, head on table, snoring heavily.

Eight hundred pounds! What could not be done with eight hundred pounds?

You may invest it in the Three per Cents. and get twenty-four pounds a year for it, which is not much more than a soldier's pension of a shilling a day; you may buy the stock and goodwill of a genteel shop, such as a tobacconist's or a fancy-shop with

Berlin work; you may buy a lodging-house furnished; you may publish two or three novels with it; you may have your portrait painted; you may buy a really beautiful blue vase with it—you may do quantities of useful things with eight hundred pounds; but the Colonel thought not of these. His fancy quickly turned to London and the West End.

He stood there for half an hour and more with the notes in his hand, irresolute, listening to the voice of the Tempter.

Now the Tempter whispered this and that, but always came back to the same point, which was that with eight hundred pounds for capital a man who knew how to play might do very well in London. Why, when he—not the Tempter, but the Colonel—was a youngster he lost his whole fortune because he played with such men as he himself had since become. Eight hundred pounds! Why, with two hundred he could go back to that old life and begin again. Nobody knew anything when he came away except that he was stone-broke. Yes, he could go back again. He was fifty, and he had grown quite grey. That could be remedied. It was fifteen years since he disappeared from the West End, and now he could go back again if he liked. Heavens! how he should enjoy once more the glad following of the rosy hours! Besides, as the honest and virtuous Tempter said, it was not Johnny's money at all. He had lied. He said there was no money; it was quite certainly the money of the dead man. Serve Johnny right to punish him for lying, and to take away his money.

It grew late. The drunken man slept on. There are never any clocks in log-huts until the agent in clocks has called. But I think it must have been midnight when the Tempter said his last word, and the Colonel, without listening to that other voice, which said that though he had done a good many tolerably bad things, he had never done anything half so bad as what he was now going to do, and did he think that he could ever after it consider himself worthy of any respect or consideration at all? For to swagger and captain it around, to cheat and bully with those who cheat and bully—ready at a moment to fight for your life—to be a ruffian, open and confessed, hath in it something of bravery which commands a little admiration; but to be a mean, secret thief—to reward hospitality with robbery—this, indeed, is different. But this voice was a small voice, and the other was loud and persuasive. Therefore the Colonel put on his hat, turned down the lamp, stuffed the bundles, notes, letters, and all into his pocket, and stepped out stealthily and disappeared.

An hour or so afterwards, Johnny moved uneasily, moaned and grunted in his sleep, discovered that the edge of the table was sharp and his neck stiff; then he opened his eyes and lifted his head, feeling a little cold and somewhat cramped from the position in which he had been lying.

Pretty well awake now, he slowly rose and tried to shake himself together. Then he remembered something.

"Colonel!" he said hoarsely.

There was no reply.

"Colonel's asleep," he whispered. "Let's go to bed."

He threw himself into the bunk and drew the blankets over him, without the usual preliminary of undressing. As soon as he was quite comfortable, he addressed himself to sleep, but first, as a matter of custom, he felt in the right-hand corner for the recess in which he kept his bundles. Very odd; he could not find them. They were not there.

In a moment he was broad awake, and perfectly sober. On his knees, he began to fumble and feel everywhere for his treasures. Then he sprang out of bed, crying, "Colonel! Colonel! wake up!" and groped about for his matches. When he had found them, still wondering why the Colonel slept so heavily, he lit the lamp, and searched again for his packets. But in vain. They were gone. Then he looked for his guest, and he was gone too.

Then he understood what had happened, and seizing his gun with a loud cry, the robbed man ran wildly out into the road, and rushed along the track southward. That was a great pity, because the Colonel, who felt quite safe and easy in his mind, and was not making any violent effort to cover the ground quickly, was marching due north.

II.

ON THE RIVER LEA.

The River Lea is honourably known among fellows of the Royal Geographical Society, schoolboys who go in for their prize, and the makers of maps, as forming the eastern boundary of Middlesex. It is not, however, a river which goes into society, like a certain other river which runs along the south of the same county. This is to be accounted for in several ways: first, because society is a good long way off; next, because you cannot get at the East of London except from Broad Street, which is not a society station; next, on account of what may be called the personal character of the river. Its mouth is respectable but homely, and a good deal encumbered, though of a lordly breadth at high-tide, with barges, lighters, works, and wharves. Higher up, it shows a sad want of directness and purpose; it winds about among the low meadows and marshes without ever making a bold push among such unresisting material; it continually goes off into three or four channels; for a large part of its course the prospect on one bank at least always terminates with a row of low cottages, built of grey brick with red roofs. Even the Thames at Cliveden could not maintain its dignity against that mean endless row of small grey houses and red roofs.

Yet the river is regarded with passionate fondness by all who dwell between Stratford and Hertford. For you may fish in it all the year round; and you may now row upon it for nine months in the year; you may bathe in it for three months in the year; and you may get drowned in it, and very often do, if you happen to be upset and cannot swim. On half-holidays and on summer evenings, there are as many boats upon it as on the Thames at Richmond. There is also to be found upon its banks the River-side Jack, a creature whom, at first, it seems incongruous to meet so far east. The ignorant traveller would as soon expect a salmon in the River Lea as a Jack like him of Putney, Richmond, Chertsey, and Kingston upon its banks. Yet here he is; using his favourite language with the one favourite adjective which goes with everything, like the Spanish onion, or curry-powder, or Soyer's Universal Sauce: patriotically drinking the national beverage; loafing about among the boats; always pretending to be extremely busy, yet never doing anything, and still a waiter—'he also serves, who only stands and waits'—upon Providence for the casual tip; his expectations being pitched lower than those of his Richmond cousins. The Lea River Jack has a cottage upon the bank, green with damp in the winter and picturesque with dirt in the summer; behind the cottage is a garden in which he grows the most gigantic Jerusalem artichokes—perhaps that vegetable, in some subtle, unknown way, appeals to a poetic side, hitherto unsuspected, in his nature: here and there he has a ferry-boat, in which he will take you across for a penny. Whether business is brisk or slack, he has always a rod or two in the water, and as he goes about his chores, he still keeps one eye upon the float, ready at a moment's notice to strike the silver roach.

If you were to ascend the river from the mouth, where it is called Bow Creek, beside the East India Dock, you would pass, on your left, wharves, gasworks, and mankind, all the way to Bromley, Bow, and Stratford, till you came to Clapton; and all the way upon the right you would have a broad and dreary flat, which has many names, but is one swamp—the Great Dismal Swamp—once, I believe, and up to the days of Henry the Eighth, who loved hunting in Epping and Hainault, and thereabout, full of alligators, snapping turtles, and Wantley Dragons, or at least the Sussex kind, which were smaller. No one must contemplate this swamp too long, or on many days, except when there is a sunny sky above, with a west wind driving light clouds about, making alternations of light and shade.

It is not, I think, until one gets to Clapton that the stream becomes possible for those who are affected by their surroundings; above that point it is a real river, which may be rowed upon or fished in, and enjoyed as much as any other river in England, though with more moderate raptures. It is not so picturesque as the Wye, for instance; nor so bright as the southern Avon;

nor so dashing as the Usk ; nor so pleasing as the Tyne ; nor so lovely as the Coquet : but yet it pleases.

It was on the evening of Thursday, the 28th of June in the present year of grace, 1883, that among other boats upon the River Lea was one—the only one with which we are concerned—containing two persons. Had these two persons been old, or even middle-aged, nobody would have noticed them ; but as they were both young, and one was not only young, but very pleasing for the eye to rest upon, people on the bank looked after them as the boat sped on her way. As for the evening, it was exactly the sort of evening which this homely river wants to set off its simple beauty. The wind was from the west, and blew in gusts, but not too heavily ; the clouds scudded across the sky ; the air was clear ; there was a lively ripple in the water, and a pleasant lapping and plashing of the water among the tall rank grass which serves the Lea at this part in place of reeds and water-lilies. The river was quite full and brimming over ; but the girl who sat in the stern and held the rudder-strings could not see the flat marshy fields, because of this tall grass standing in the red clay of the low bank. When the sun got a chance between the impertinent clouds, the wavelets were blue and bright, and sparkled and danced merrily, like bubbles in a glass of champagne, or zoedone at the very least ; so that it did one good only to see them. When a flying cloud hid the sun, and the wind came down upon the water, it became inky-black, and the little billows were as threatening as if they had been great waves, and the girl's eyes fell instinctively upon the young man with her, as if for protection. This was quite natural, because he was her lover ; any girl would have done the same.

As for her appearance, I declare that there was nothing at all out of the common in her face ; and yet she was very far from being common. Women said of her that she was rather pretty, in their cold and critical way ; young men would have found her charming, but she only knew one or two. I have seen thousands of such pretty, sweet-faced English girls, with the seal of goodness and tenderness on their foreheads ; you may see them in any town of this happy realm wherever girls do congregate ; that is to say, in church or at evening parties—whether most they love their prayers or their waltzing is a question which I leave to philosophers —they are as plenty as blackberries ; and yet, though so plenty, they are so very precious. This girl, Milly Montoro, was nineteen, or perhaps twenty ; of her beauty, it is enough to say that it was entirely conformable to the ideal of this present year, which, among other things, likes its damsels to be tall rather than petites, and perhaps prefers a brunette to a blonde. This evening she was perfectly happy ; she had all she wanted : love, and plenty of it ; youth, health, strength, hope, a modest sufficiency—what can girl desire more ? She was so happy that she felt in a way ashamed, and afraid of showing her happiness too much, lest George should

think her silly, which indeed she was not. She was so happy that she did not care much about talking, and would have been contented to go on watching river, and sky, and bank, and the face of her lover before her, without a word: she was so happy, in short, that she felt as if all the rest of the world must needs be as happy as herself; and the golden age with Roger Bontemps; the Ship which is bound to come home, but is always overdue; the Home of Plenty; the Land of Cockaigne; the Garden of Delight, and the Paradise of Sweet Contentment, were all come together most unexpectedly, and had every intention of staying, and never going away again at all! A blissful dream, truly! Happy those who fail not of it once in their lives!

Along the bank there sat rows of anglers. On the Lea they are of all ages. The angler, like the poet and the æsthete, is born, not made: some upon the bank were old, old men—seventy, eighty, ninety years of age. Charles Lamb, fifty years ago, used to see them in the same place, fishing with the same rod, after the same roach. Others were middle-aged men, whose work in the City, though necessary, was irksome, because it kept them from the banks; others were young men, but thoughtful and reflective, who sit every evening, rod in hand, in grave silence and patience, while their frivolous compeers, in cruelty collars and tight trousers, go a-mashing; others, again, were mere boys and striplings yet, already bound for life to the brotherhood, though no oaths or secret mysteries of initiation and reception were offered or required. Milly pitied them a little this evening: it certainly did seem to her that men at every time of life would be better employed in making love than in fishing.

"Oh, George," she leaned forward and murmured low, "do the young men never leave the banks and look for some girl, to make her happy?"

"You would like everybody to be happy," said her lover, resting on his oars. "Why, my darling, it is not every girl who can make every man happy. Do you think any other girl in the world would have made me happy?"

If you think of it, there seems a little arrogance and self-conceit in this little speech; but the young man did not intend it. What he meant was, that not every girl has the power of making the happiness of even an average, ordinary, typical, commonplace young man such as himself; he was quite a humble young man in his own estimation. He designed to pay a high compliment to his betrothed, because, so lofty being the ideal woman even in the most common place manly bosom, Milly Montoro alone, of all the women he had ever seen, reached this giddy height. She understood him to mean this, and she blushed and lowered her eyes, being afraid for herself, lest she might fail in this point or in that, and so have to come down to a lower step, whereby she might imperil the affections she had won.

The early days of courtship are, to an innocent maid, as the steps of one who walks with trembling feet upon frozen snow, doubting the assurance of the guide who has gone before, and assures her that all is safe; going delicately, fearfully, pit-a-pat, softly feeling the strength of the treacherous surface, until, quite assured that it is safe indeed, the traveller may walk in ease and happiness. The very peril, however, lends excitement and pleasure to the journey.

So the girl listened, and her heart glowed within her to hear these words; and yet she was afraid. Is it not a delightful thing to feel, for once in a life, that you are a real angel, wanting nothing but a couple of wings, and bound to play up to the part, and to scorn the little temperous tiffs, sharp sayings, unworthy thoughts, with which some girls, not yet fully assured that they belong to the holy army of angels, do poison and corrupt their minds?

"Oh, George," she murmured, "do not spoil me, or you will be disappointed afterwards. Let us talk of our future."

The young man, at the invigorating thought of the future, grasped his sculls with firmer hands, and put his back into half a dozen strokes, so that the little craft, astonished, and a little hurt in her feelings and rowlocks, clove the waters at racing speed.

I am firmly fixed in the opinion, and am prepared to maintain it in open tourney, lance in rest, and buckler (especially buckler) on arm, that the whole hope of the country in the future, its mainstay in the present, its glory in the past, lies, will lie, and has always lain, in those boys who do not distinguish themselves, or show any enthusiasm over the subjects which we commonly call *literæ humaniores*, or *belles lettres*—in other words, who do not "take to books," but prefer the carpenter's shop, the lathe, the Zoological Gardens, the natural history of birds, beasts, fishes, and men; who want always to find out how things are done, with what tools and methods, and then are never satisfied until they can see their way to improve those methods; whose heaven upon this earth is a chemical and physical laboratory; who really cannot be made to care for poetry—unless there is a rattling good story in it—or for a story unless it is real, full of adventure, and the fellow who wrote it knew what he was talking about; who have no feeling for style, and no taste for the rhythm of verse, the fine aroma of an essay, the balance of a period, the pointing of an epigram. That those who do—bookish men—exist at all seems to those, who do not, chiefly due to the necessity for keeping printers occupied. But what a waste of life it appears compared with that which is wholly given over to practical contrivances, making easy what has hitherto proved hard, and cheap what has hitherto been dear. George Ambrose was one of the practical men. Look at him as he handles his sculls, with bare head and uprolled sleeves. You see that he has a clear, steady eye, clean-cut features, a mouth set firm, and a square chin. These are all indications pointing in the same direction. As a boy, when other boys read books, he made things, or

inquired into causes. When it became time for him to leave school he requested that he might not be sent into the City, whither all his schoolfellows were bound, but might find a place, if it were only as door-keeper, in some establishment where they made things. His request was granted, because in the lower valley of the Lea such a request is recognised as not only reasonable, but as likely to lead unto things substantial. The only difficulty with a young man is to choose: for there are at Stratford, West Ham, Hackney Wick, yea, and at Clapton itself, men running many and divers trades, arts, and industries—those who spin jute, make cigar-boxes, creosote, patent fuel, dye, tanks, crucibles, grease, chicory, drain-pipes; with workers in glass, iron, leather, stone, lead, gelatine, tin, zinc, and xylonite: and money to be made in all these trades did one know how to choose the most likely. Young Ambrose made two or three false starts. First, he entered the works of a gas company, but speedily mastered the subject, and despised a thing in which the amount of knowledge required is so limited. Next, he went into a galvanized iron company, but pined for still wider scope, and finally began afresh at the bottom of the ladder in a great chemical company, which had to do with a whole group of things, every one of inexhaustible interest. He was now twenty-six years of age; he had worked his way up to a good salary and highly responsible work: he had taken his degree in science at the university in Piccadilly: he was a member of the Chemical Society; he had written papers, and was already known; and he was so full of ambitions, projects, designs, hopes, and plans, that it was impossible for him to remain any longer alone, but needs must that he take a wife. Whom should he take but the girl he had known for a dozen years, who lived with his own cousin, Reginald Ambler—the best and sweetest of girls, and eke the prettiest? He, who had thought for ten years of nothing but the laboratory at the works, his experiments, his science, and his reading, discovered suddenly that he had always been in love with Milly Montoro; and when he proposed to her—which he did with as much eloquence, yet fear and trembling, as if he had been a poet of the first water—he told her so, and ascribed not to himself, but to her, all the merit.

"Milly dear," he said, after throwing his excitement into the boat, "the house is perfect: no basement, no kitchen below; two rooms on the ground-floor, three above—nobody can want more. It's only two miles from Stratford, and one from the river, where we shall like to take a row now and then. As to the garden, you shall have the front for your flowers, and I shall have the back for peas and beans. On Saturday afternoons I will look after it."

"Yes, George; and I will look after it every day. Go on. You will start every morning at half-past eight. Yes, I know—breakfast at half-past seven; but you will be home to tea by seven every evening. George, we must make our evenings delightful. Sometimes you shall read to me. I will play for you; I will teach you

to sing. You have got a very good voice, sir, only you want to be taught how to keep it in order. On Sundays we will go to church together—no more reading chemistry on Sunday mornings—and after church a little walk, and then dinner. Think of having you to dinner every Sunday! After dinner I shall send you for a long walk to shake the cobwebs out of your brain, and you shall come home to tea and supper. Perhaps we may have one or two of the children to tea with us; and, George, we will furnish the spare room, so as to give a bed to them sometimes, will we not? They are as good as my brothers and sisters, you know; and——"

"You mean you have been as good as a sister to them, Milly," he laughed. "Yes—you shall have your spare room, and put as many of the children into the bed as the bed will hold. My dear, I do not want you to lose your friends."

"No, George." The tears stood in her eyes for a moment, but soon cleared away. "It is bad enough for them, poor dears, as it is. They have been crying ever since it was fixed for August."

George showed no kind of sympathy with these poor sufferers, knowing that their loss was his own gain. This feeling very much helps to harden the heart; and besides, he was ready to explain, if necessary, that every girl must expect to exchange her home for her husband, and to point out that it was not as if the young Amblers had any real claim upon Milly, who was neither kith nor kin, but had only lived with them for eight years or so; and the fact that they regarded her as their elder sister did not make her one, but showed only the extraordinary goodness of her disposition, seeing that she could command an amount of affection that can only be wrung from the unsympathetic breasts of the young by extraordinary sacrifice and ceaseless devotion. These thoughts passed through his brain quickly, but without requiring him to put them into words. So he only looked at his *fiancée* and nodded his head, and she understood just as well as if he had talked a whole yard, or an ell or two, of printed slips.

Then the young chemist began to talk of his own schemes, which it would be a shame to reveal, because he is in reality another Edison, only as yet his plans have not become patents. He knew all the things which want to be invented or made practicable through being made cheap, with the inventions which want to be converted from toys to practical purposes, and the possibilities of certain scientific facts which are as yet in the limbo of unpractical laboratories. Heavens! what extended openings, chances, opportunities, and occasions there are for the young chemist who has got eyes that look outside his retort, and can connect his laboratory with humanity!

"You shall find out all the things that have to be found out, George!" cried Milly, as if every woman has the power of conferring genius, insight, conception, and more power to his elbow upon the man she loves. And yet not every woman, my friends; but

unto some women is this power given, and then happy—thrice happy—is he whom that woman loves. The powers of women are as yet imperfectly known, which is one reason why they sometimes try to imitate man; and I wish I could be born a hundred years hence, when these powers are understood and developed, and be clever, strong, handsome, fresh, and frolic. Then would a great career await me. Perhaps—who knows?

"Oh," he went on, "when one thinks of the wonderful world which is opening out all round us: the instruments which register speech so that it can never be lost—fancy, Milly, all one's foolish words preserved for ever!—the little machine with which a scene is caught in a moment and so never lost: the wire which sends messages, and the wire which whispers words; the unknown forces which our great men are reducing to order and obedience, so that before many years the reign of steam, and gas, and coal will be at an end! It seems as if there was nothing else worth living for, and everything outside the laboratory was a sham and a delusion, except the school which prepares the boys for the workshop."

"And me, George," said Milly jealously. "Am I not worth living for? Tell me all that is in your thoughts always. I know nothing of your science, but you shall teach me. Promise that you will tell me everything."

"My dear," he replied, "that is the reason why I want you to marry me, because I must talk to some one."

Again, he did not mean to be selfish, yet he might have seemed so: but he had never learned the language of compliment, and he meant that to Milly it was an honour that he should think her able to understand and to share his thoughts; and all, just as before, because he was a humble youth, who felt himself to be quite of the ordinary kind, but educated, which Milly was not, only that she belonged to the nobler kind of women who could, he thought, understand everything without education. Indeed, one knows hundreds of women who do, and will sit out the most scientific lecture, bristling with hard words, their faces as full of intelligence at the end as at the beginning; and I do not for a moment believe the wicked calumny which accuses them of abstracting their thoughts at the very beginning, and so remaining during the whole discourse.

Then he, in his turn, listened while Milly told him her thoughts, but bashfully, being afraid lest, after the great ambition of her lover, her own hopes might seem to him small. Yet they were not, because they were nothing short of an ardent desire to possess her life with ease, love, and happiness, and her soul with comfort. No woman can desire more, so that, in fact, Milly was most ambitious. It is true that almost every girl permits herself the same dream. While they talked, the sun went down, and a light mist rose upon the low ground and spread over the river.

Then they turned, and George rode gently down stream, the water plashing at the bows.

"George," said Milly presently, "I am thinking of my father."

"Why," he replied, "it is four years since you heard from him. He must be dead, long ago."

"Yes," she sighed; "else he would never have forgotten me. I will show you some of his letters. They are full of love and thought for me. He must be dead—my poor father! And to think that he never saw me since I was a child in arms. He was only a clerk in the City, you know; and suddenly he resolved to go abroad and make his fortune, which shows what a courageous spirit he had. But no one ever thought he would have done so splendidly."

"No one ever knows," said George, "what he can do, until he is put upon his mettle. Yet he must have been a determined and clever man. Because, you see, Milly, if fortunes are to be made in America, the Americans are generally sharp enough to keep them in their own hands. At the same time, very often people do not see what lies at their feet. What did he go away for? Because I am quite sure a clever man can do quite as well at home."

"Can he?" asked Milly. "I thought that everybody who goes to America makes a great fortune."

"That is what they hope to do beforehand. When they are there, I believe they find life as hard, and money as scarce, as it is at home. There is a clerk in the accountant's office at the works who remembers your father. Says nobody ever thought much of his cleverness; says he was a lazy, easy sort of chap, who did his work and went home, and was happy. No one ever could understand why he threw up a good place and went away."

"Yet," said Milly, "my father said once in his letters that America offers such a vast field for a man that his money can be invested as fast as it is made. Sometimes he spoke of millions."

"Why, dear," said her lover, "if these millions could be found! They must be somewhere; but I am afraid they have got into the wrong hands; what splendid works we would put up! Oh, Lord!" he sighed heavily. "What a laboratory we could have with a million to spend on it! Think of the electric batteries! What experiments we could direct, and what an army of workmen we could employ!"

"It would be too delightful, George," Milly replied, kindling in sympathy. "You should be the greatest man in Stratford. But my poor father is dead, and as for his fortune, that must be all gone and scattered."

I think she imagined her father's fortune to consist of dollars tied up in sacks. But we know otherwise.

"If," he said, "your father's money was invested, the investments must be somewhere and the papers in somebody's hands. Unless, that is, people stole them and forged his signature. There must be

all kinds of mortgages, shares, leases, contracts, bonds, all sorts of things. Unless, again—money got easily is as easily lost—the speculations proved disastrous. Come, my dear; never think of your father's fortune. We shall never see any of it. Why, with my three hundred a year and your hundred and fifty, we shall begin twice as well off as most young married people. And of course I shall get a rise: not to speak of the great things we shall do presently. And here we are. Steady, steady. Let me get out first."

They walked along the lane, between the river and the road. Milly turned back to look at the river when they reached the higher ground.

The romantic suburb of Upper Clapton stands upon a terrace, like Richmond, and overlooks the broad valley of the Lea; gardens lie on the gentle slope of the low hill, and beyond these you can discern the river winding about among the flat meadows; beyond the meadows, again, are the hills and wooded inclines of Walthamstow, Woodford, and Chingford; beyond these (but you cannot see it) is Epping Forest.

"See," said Milly, "how white and strange the meadows look with the mist upon them, and how shadowy the marshes lie beyond it! And look! did you ever see a moon so big and dim?"

"A sign of rain," said George the practical.

"George," said the girl, shivering, "I feel afraid. Give me your hand. How strong it is! If there was any danger I should always have this strong hand, shouldn't I?"

He kissed her—no one was in the lane, and it was twilight and misty beside—he kissed her twice, on her forehead and her lips, saying:

"Why, dear, what danger can there be? And if there were!" He clenched his fist and his eyes looked dangerous. "Come, my darling. It is past nine o'clock, and the Great Discoverer will be getting hungry. To say nothing of Kepler, Copernica, and Tycho Brahe."

III.

IS THE WORLD ROUND?

SUPPER was laid in the dining-room of Veritas Villa waiting for the return of Milly and her lover. I call it the dining-room, but it was also the breakfast-room, the sitting-room, the day-nursery, the play-room, the work-room, and my lady's boudoir; not because there were not other rooms in this genteel villa, but because the drawing-room was wanted for Mr. Ambler's maps and books, and the breakfast-room, which opened conveniently upon the garden, for his observatory, his models, his Orrery, his telescope, and his scientific instruments. If you belong to a great man you must be content to let him have the comfort. There are so few great men

that this law causes little hardship. Besides, who would not willingly give up two out of three rooms for the pride of being an Ambler?

The boys, this evening, were shaping bows—that is to say, they were making things with knives—boys who never have pocket-money are greatly to be envied, because they learn to make so many things for themselves; and the girls were spinning. That is to say, Copernica Ambler, the only girl in the room, was finishing a frock for her sister Somerville, now in bed and asleep, while her mother, with a great basket beside her, which never grew less in bulk, was looking after the stockings and the socks, darning-needle in hand. Across her face lay the line of care which marks the face of the woman who has to make every shilling do the work of half-a-crown, and contrives, manages, and continually occupies her mind with the maintenance of her children. Who does not know such women by the score? It seems a waste of life, this giving it all to the boys and girls; but perhaps it is made up somehow—here or hereafter.

When Milly came home, followed by her lover, there was a general stir, with the sudden appearance of smiles and revival of cheerfulness, due partly to the immediate prospect of supper, and partly as the toll of affection exacted at all hours by this young person. For the mother looked up and smiled over her pile of stockings; and Copernica, who was a sharp-featured thin girl of sixteen, who wore spectacles, held up her newly finished skirt for admiration; and the boys shouted; and everyone called upon Milly for sympathy with his work; and everybody had something to tell her, which was always the way when she came home, whether she had been away for an hour or a day.

"You must be hungry, George," said Mrs. Ambler. "Tycho, my dear, go call your father."

Everybody, or nearly everybody, knows Reginald Ambler by reputation; a very large class of humanity, namely, the Editors, know his handwriting, and cruelly toss his communications into the basket unread; few, comparatively, have the advantage of his personal acquaintance. He is a man now about fifty years of age; he is rather tall and thin, his hair, gone grey, lies over his forehead in a great mass, which he is always pushing back; his eyes are large and full; they are also of a light blue colour, so that his face seems at first furnished with too much eye. When he is in repose, the eyes have a far-off look; when he is talking, they are quick and eager. His lips are nervous and his fingers are restless. Columbus, one thinks, must have been a good deal like Mr. Reginald Ambler. As for his manner, it varies with every hour, ranging from the depth of despondency—when an article has been rejected or a letter treated contemptuously—to the height of confidence, hope, and happiness—when he has begun another or has trapped some unfortunate into a controversy. And he has never been known to engage in any other subject of conversation, or think upon any other matter whatever, except his Great Discovery.

To-night he came to the supper-table and sat down with a smile of welcome.

"Milly, my child," he said, "take your place beside me. George, you next to her, of course. Copernica, my dear, this side of me. Galileo, fill George's glass. Cut some bread, Tycho, my boy. Kepler, some cheese for Milly and your sister. So——" He rubbed his hands and looked round upon his boys with the simple pride of a father, though he was so great a man. "Ptolemy and Mary Somerville have gone to bed, I suppose?

"This day," he went on, "will be a remarkable day in my history. I have noted it in the Autobiography. Children, I have now laid down the last of the great voyages round the world completely on the map. It threatened to be troublesome at first, but it agrees, I find—of course I expected nothing less—with my anticipations in every particular!"

"Oh, father!" Copernica clapped her hands. The wife smiled, her mind being still full of the socks in the basket. Milly nodded and laughed. The boys alone said nothing. Boys, if you come to think of it, never understand a father's greatness. Many great men have lamented this to me, speaking confidentially. "Oh, father!" cried Copernica, "what will they say now?"

"They will say, my daughter, what they always do say. The Fellows of the Geographical Society will sneer; the Editors of scientific journals will refuse to listen; comic writers will make jokes upon it: map-makers and globe-makers will try to hide the truth; and the rest of the world, like George here, will pass it over without paying any attention."

"If it were something in the chemical line," said George, "I would listen; as it is not, I have not time for it."

This he said out of subtlety and duplicity, because in his secret soul he jeered at the Great Discovery.

"No, no: and thus it is," said the Philosopher, "that the greatest discoveries steal upon the world, and those who make them are unheeded. I have now laid down upon the map the route of every great voyager; my distances, my time, agree with his! Show me the globe-geographer who has ever attempted the like. Yes, my work is done: the chain of evidence is complete; I can at any moment, if I should be called away, leave the work of my life to the judgment of posterity. As for my contemporaries, they may, if they choose, continue to class me with the crack-brained enthusiasts——"

"Oh, father!" said Copernica.

"——who think they can square the circle, find out the site of Paradise——"

"I wish I could go and look in at the gate," said Milly.

"——and transmute metals."

"That would be only changing the currency," said George.

The boys were steadily eating. They had heard this talk before.

"As for meeting me on a platform," Mr. Ambler continued, "they remember the victory over Bagshott, and tremble."

Bagshott was a Baptist minister who once ventured on a public controversy with Mr. Ambler, and had his head knocked into a cocked-hat, a thing quite improper for a minister of the Gospel to wear, and recanted, and was now a fervent disciple.

"As for admitting at once and peacefully that I am right, and they themselves, therefore, wrong, that is, I suppose, too much to expect of anyone, especially of men who live by the propagation of error."

"A great deal too much," said George.

The boys went on with their supper, and said nothing. The two elder lads, Tycho Brahe and Kepler, arrived at the dignity of clerkery, had long since plainly understood, and now made no secret of their opinion, that a Great Discovery may be a most calamitous thing for a family. Palissy, himself, did not bring a more rooted antipathy to fame into his home-circle than their father. Honour and glory are very fine things indeed; meantime, when they are abstract qualities, and therefore unproductive, and the heels of your boots are down, they might be sold, if there were any purchaser, for whatever they would fetch in the rough.

"Better, far better," thought Tycho, "for my father to care nothing at all about honour, but a good deal about making money, and saving it or using it to push his boys."

Such a father he would have desired, red of cheek, important in his bearing, pompous in his talk, as might be seen every day on Stamford Hill; a father who could put his sons into good houses, buy them partnerships, give them holidays at the seaside, with—oh, all the things for which these lads vainly longed.

Reginald Ambler is nothing less, if you please, than the Discoverer of the great truth that the world, so far from being a round ball, thoughtfully flattened at the north and south, so as to prevent the ice from slipping down and spoiling the equator, is really, as can be demonstrated with ease, a great flat circular disc of unknown thickness. What we call the Artic Pole, believing that the world twirls perpetually and ignominiously round it, like a fat goose upon the spit, is in fact a central circle of ice and snow, the origin and cause of which must be left for the discovery of future philosophers; round it is the temperate zone; beyond this, the torrid zone; beyond this again another great temperate circle, in which Australia, the Cape of Good Hope, and New Zealand are comfortably placed; "neither het nor cauld," as the Scot said. Outside this vast temperate zone, the ocean lies, a tract of sea indeed, immeasurable, desolate, without land or sail. Spread round in another, and the last, great circle, beyond the ocean at the outer edge is a Rim, ledge, hedge, barrier, frontier-mark, boundary-wall, or whatever the inadequacy of language permits us to call it, of thick, solid, mountainous ice. How broad is this Rim, whether it stretches out for ever into

boundless space, whether it is narrow, so that perhaps some day the voyager may hope to reach its limit, and to peep over into infinity, no one can at present say. From time to time ships, which have sailed south, have reported cliffs, rocks, and mountains, ice-bound, covered with snow, inaccessible, inhospitable, without life. Nothing lives in this boundary Rim except, upon the edge of it, a few seals, walruses, narwhals, sword fish, polar bears, whales, and such sea monsters, who do not know how miserable they are. As for men, there are none at all, and will be none till time shall be no more.

"What is beyond the Rim," said Reginald modestly, "I cannot say, any more than the globe-professors can tell you what is beyond the farthest star."

This improved kind of earth requires an entirely new disposition of the heavens.

Reginald, quite early in the history of his Discovery, remembered this, and constructed, with infinite pains, a beautiful Orrery. In this, the sun, no longer an immense globe of fire ninety millions of miles away, or thereabouts, but a comfortable little fireplace, so to speak, half a dozen miles above the world, went round and round above the great circle of the torrid zone, wobbling to north or south so as to produce summer and winter. He pulled a string, and you saw the daily and the annual motion most clearly set forth. The moon and planets in the same way went on what seemed to be recklessly independent and dangerous paths of their own, and the fixed stars went round the polar stars continually. By an ingenious adjustment of bars, eccentrics, and curves, he accounted for all the natural phenomena—except one. This exception came home to him sometimes in the dead of night, and took the conceit out of him. He had never been able to account for lunar eclipses. Why not lunar eclipses? It is too much to say that his faith ever wavered, but he was worried and rendered unhappy when he remembered that his Orrery would account for everything except a lunar eclipse. But those moments, happily, were rare. Mostly he was content to gaze upon his model with a perfect satisfaction, to show inquirers over and over again how, upon a flat and stationary earth, all the natural phenomena—morning, noon, and evening, with the four seasons, the phases of the moon, the winter's downward slope, and the summer's elevation of the sun—can all be explained and accounted for.

Naturally he became one of the bugbears—there are always half a dozen living at the same time—of the scientific world. He wrote to all the papers, journals, transactions, and reports of the learned bodies; he offered to lecture, he asked for an hour—only one short hour; he sent his name, with the offers of a paper, to the British Association, to the Social Science Congress, to the Balloon Society, to the Church Congress, to the Oriental Congress, to the Congress of Librarians, to the Congress of Head-masters, to the Geographical Society, the Geologists, the Society of Arts, the Physical Society,

the Royal Astronomical Society, the Young Men's Christian Institute, the Sunday School Union, the Church Missionary Society, the Open-Air Mission, the Salvation Army, the Eleusis Club, the Grand Lodge of Freemasons, and the Congress of Cathedral Vergers, not once, but every year, offering to read a paper, show his maps and models, and reconstruct the geography and shape of the world. It is sad to relate that no one paid the least attention to these proposals, and, being now fifty years of age, and with many years' experience, he had ceased to expect a hearing from these learned bodies, any more than he expected admission into the *Times*, *Standard*, *Daily News*, *Morning Post*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Daily Chronicle*, of the letters which he regularly sent them all once every year, after six months of preparation. As for the monthly, weekly, and quarterly journals, he had tried them all. They would have none of him. And as for eminent men of science, there was not a single mathematician at Cambridge, or a professor of science in any university or college of the United Kingdom to whom he did not propose a meeting, public or private, to discuss his theories. The signal victory already alluded to, which he achieved over the Rev. Mr. Bagshott, Baptist minister of Hackney Wick, in a public discussion held at the chapel, was an abiding proof of his strength in advocacy and the goodness of his cause.

The school is small. It consists really of two, the Prophet himself and Bagshott, but it is full of zeal. They have an office and an office-boy in Chiswell Street. The office is a second-pair back; the office-boy, whose hours are from nine to six, spends his time chiefly in the street surveying mankind; the publications—tracts and maps—of the society are on sale there, but no one has ever bought a copy except a journalist, who once saw his way to a scoffing article on the subject, and so bought everything there was, and put the things in his pocket-book and went away, and presently forgot all about it. In fact, there exists a general conspiracy against the Truth.

"Astronomers," said Mr. Ambler, "tremble at mention of my name for fear, but pretend to smile in scorn. They hope their system will last at least their own time, forgetting that to be found out after death will be more fatal to their reputation than to yield in life. In my Autobiography will be found not only the 'Short Reasons' but also the 'Argument at Length,' and the 'Questions' which I have sent to every one of them demanding a reply, a platform, a public discussion, or an opportunity to state my views. Not one of them has given me either. It will, indeed," he added, with a lofty sneer, "be greatly to the credit of the Universities, in the next century, that they refused even to let me speak."

It was in this house that Milly was placed when the death of her mother left her alone at ten years of age. The reasons why Mr. Reginald Ambler was chosen for her guardian were unusual, but not without precedent. He had a cousin—many people have

cousins; this cousin, Richard Ambler, a practical Ambler, an unimaginative Ambler, was a solicitor. Richard Ambler, therefore, on being asked by the child's relations—they were unnatural relations, descended by the parent's side from a certain illustrious uncle or two—who wanted to put the burden of the little girl on somebody else's shoulders, and to find a home and a guardian for a child whom nobody wanted, naturally considered first of all which of his own friends would find the money most useful, and seeing that among all his friends and cousins no one was so perfectly hopeless, impecunious, and unpractical as Reginald the Discoverer, and few so poor, sent her to him: not for any fitness or special aptitude which Reginald possessed for the task of guardian, but wholly and solely that the child's money, which now amounted to a hundred and eighty pounds a year—house property having gone up—might be paid yearly to Reginald for the good of himself and his household. They were kind-hearted people, and as Milly was a willing, clever kind of child, they were easily, though gradually, persuaded to let her become governess, nurse, assistant-housekeeper, maker of puddings and pies, milliner, dressmaker, chaplain, adviser, counsellor, and eldest sister to the family. "And oh, my dear," said Mrs. Ambler, when Milly's engagement began, "what we should have done without you nobody knows; and what we are going to do without you nobody can tell."

Milly's life was so busy that she never understood how dull it would seem to anyone outside the house, for there were in it no amusements, no sights, no theatres, no concerts, no opera, no pictures, and even very few novels; nor perceived that she ought to have been treated differently; nor comprehended that her guardian was regarded by everybody as a lunatic with a harmless craze; nor knew or suspected that there were any enjoyments to be had in life other than those within her reach, namely, the children in good temper and looking nice, the Sunday church, a summer evening walk, and the daily cup of tea. She was, however, distinguished above all her contemporaries of Clapton Common by the possession of a romantic history. She was the daughter of a man who had made a most Glorious Fortune. Everybody knew so much. Nobody knew what the Fortune actually was, either in amount or in form, whether it was silver, oil, hogs, or railways; whether it had been acquired by rings and corners, by bulling and bearing, by lying, treachery, and deceit, by contracts, by plunder and pillage of the public money, or in any of the many ways in which many tempt fortune and a few succeed, winning thereby the universal respect of their fellow-creatures. Mr. Montoro—no one ever spoke of him without the honourable prefix—had been once a clerk in the City. Somewhere about twenty years ago he threw up his place and went away to seek his Fortune. And he found it. Matter of common knowledge that he found it; that he had sent none of it home was also known; and that for four or five

years his daughter had heard nothing from him, whence it might be concluded that he was dead. And the great Fortune—where was that? Why, the United States of America, being so big, one might as well look for a lost needle in Hyde Park as for a lost fortune in a country popularly believed to consist entirely of men who have made enormous fortunes. No doubt it was lying somewhere packed up, and would be lost for want of some one to claim it. So that Milly was not regarded as an heiress so much as the daughter of a man who had distinguished himself. But still there was always the chance that her father might turn up, his Fortune in his hand. The thought that her father might be still alive and might yet return never left the girl. She had his letters in her desk, which she read until she knew them by heart, both those to her mother and those to herself. The former were curiously cold and constrained. He was prospering exceedingly, but he did not explain how. He was richer already than any of the people they had known at home; he was waiting an opportunity to realize some of his gains and enable her to keep her carriage, and so on. To herself the letters were full of affection and tenderness, speaking of a time when he would either go home or have his daughter with him. He spoke of his continued success, but without the least hint of his occupation, and his address was always changing; so that whatever it was, his work took him from one State to another.

The girl constructed her ideal father from the letters. He must be a gentle and quiet creature, because her mother had always spoken of him as a peaceful man who gave no offence to any, and loved tranquillity; yet he must be a man of great courage thus to have forced his way to the front, in a strange country, with no friends to help him. He must be a man of fine manner and noble mind, because his letters were full of the most admirable sentiments, and he must be a father whom any girl would be too ready to love, so full of tenderness was he himself. The letters which this poor English waif and stray wrote twice or three times every year to his daughter were in fact to him, though they were loaded with falsehoods, the one thing which kept up his soul. He consorted with gangs of the roughest; his work was the lowest; yet he had to console him the letters of his child, fresh, innocent, confiding; and he had, to lift himself out of the mire, to make up in reply some answer which should make the girl happy about him; and in order to do that he was forced to imagine himself back in civilized life, a gentleman. If you come to think of it, there wants a good deal of imagination for an unsuccessful emigrant, sunk as low as can well be, to make people at home believe that he is rolling in prosperity. It grew harder every year for the poor man, but still he persevered, until he fell in with his great stroke of luck, and became a landowner in Oregon. Then, his life being now easy, and even assured, and the whisky-bottle always handy, his brain

began to deteriorate, and he wrote no more letters. While he was a vagrant journeyman, ready to do anything, he would imagine, conceive, and describe. The moment he became settled, the fountain of fancy dried up, and he could picture no more. Therefore, the drop being too great from a millionnaire to a settler in a half-cleared spot of forest-ground, with a log-hut and a couple of blankets, he ceased to send any more letters. He was one of those who have been ruined by prosperity. Had he still continued one of a plough-gang, or a herdsman, or a hand on a steamer, or a picker-up of odd jobs, his daughter would have continued to receive those letters which for so many years had been the chief happiness of her life.

But he would come home some day, she said—he would come home.

Thus she grew up a sweet and natural girl, careless of her own beauty, because she was always thinking about the children, till she was past nineteen years of age, and then love came to her in the shape of a brave young fellow—strong, ambitious, obstinately resolved to get on, and quite certain to expect of her in return as much as he would give to her. Then, the practical business of life thus suddenly opened out before her, she left off dreaming about her father, finding henceforth no room for anyone in her dreams except her sweetheart. To be sure, she had known him ever since she had joined the Ambler household, because he was a cousin of Reginald Ambler: but then to see a young fellow occasionally in the house, and to be wooed by him, are very different things. And how that love gradually came about, I am not going to tell, because it is so simple a process that all the world may imagine it. Besides, as the princess said to the one-eyed Calender, "This is not a common love-story."

Now, on this evening, the supper was, as has been indicated, a meal of unusually cheerful character, not on account of George's presence, because he was there nearly every evening, but for certain unknown and inscrutable reasons which act upon the family atmosphere, and can only be judged by their effects, and make it, in fact, like the climate of this country, variable—sometimes cloudy, sometimes misty, and always impossible to be foretold. Everyone who belongs to a large family must know the uncertainty of the general temper, however that of the individual (meaning one's self) may be depended upon. This evening the dining-room of Veritas Villa seemed a little heaven of cheerfulness. Even the two elder boys—Kepler, who was eighteen, and Tycho, who was sixteen—listened to their father without open scorn or impatience, though they had the firmest belief that his talk was unmitigated nonsense. If anyone had held a curved hand to his ear he would probably have heard distinctly a kind of purr of satisfaction and content. Perhaps on a really fine evening in June, when it is light at nine o'clock, and the windows can be kept open, and the roses are already

in blossom, everyone ought to be in a good temper. But then fine weather does not always make fine tempers.

"I have never," the Discoverer went on—he had been talking ever since the last remark of his, quoted a few pages back, but we had other things to talk about and have not followed him—"I have never," he was saying, "thought less of a man for being wrong, so long as his mind is open to truth, and he has the courage of his opinions. Thus, I have named the children after those who were my forerunners, though they did not, it is true, prepare the way for my discoveries, but quite the contrary. Ptolemy, Kepler, Tycho Brahe, Galileo, Copernicus, are names which will always be held in honour, long, long after that of Reginald Ambler has been elevated to the highest place in the roll of honour. This, my children, may not be till after I am dead and gone; yet it will come in the lifetime of some among you. I say no more, but that three letters of inquiry have been received at the Society's offices this week. Already the cause spreads rapidly; but nothing, nothing to the wildfire-speed with which it will be taken up when once the people have been allowed to see and judge for themselves."

He drank off a whole glass of beer, paused, meditated for a few moments, with his finger to his forehead, pushed back his hair, and was about to proceed, when there were sounds of wheels in the road, and a ring at the bell of the outer gate. And this was so rare an event—indeed, an event hitherto unheard-of—that everybody jumped in his chair and looked at each other.

"It is perhaps another anxious inquirer," said the philosopher. "Can one of the Cambridge professors be going to accept the challenge?"

"It is the Parcels Delivery Company," said Kepler.

"It is Milly's great Fortune," said Copernica, "coming home from America in a box."

"It is——" began another, but stopped, because the door opened and the servant—they had but one—put in her head.

"Please, m'm," she said, "there's a gentleman wants to see Miss Milly."

They looked at each other in something like consternation. A gentleman wanting Milly! What gentleman? Who could it be?

Milly turned very pale, and took George's hand.

"Come with me, George," she said.

"If it is—if it is——" Mrs. Ambler could not say "your father." "Whoever it is, I think, Reginald, as Milly's guardian, you or both of us ought to go with her too."

"Certainly," said Mr. Ambler. "Shall we show him into the map-room? The contemplation of the charts may lead him round——"

"He shall come in here," said the mother, looking round. "Whoever it is, he shall see Milly in the ordinary way, with the children round her, bless her! Kepler, my dear, ask the gentleman to come in."

It was now nearly ten. Outside it was still twilight, but in the room there was a pleasant obscurity. Milly stood at the table, her back to the window, George beside her, holding her hand. Everybody had risen in expectation. The tears were already in Copernica's eyes, and making her spectacles dim out of pure sympathy. The family atmosphere was changed. Calm and serenity were vanished: in their place the beating heart, the quickened pulse, the agitation and oppression which fill the mind before a thunderstorm.

Then the "gentleman" came into the room. In the dim twilight Milly saw a tall figure in the doorway.

"Is there here," he said, "a young lady named Milly Montoro?"

"I am her guardian," replied Mr. Ambler. "My name is Reginald Ambler. I am, as you may be aware, the Discoverer, under Providence, of the true astronomy. Miss Montoro is here. Have you any message or parcel, or—or anything for her?"

"If you will light your gas," said the stranger, "I will tell you."

One of the boys lit the burners. They saw now a gentleman with a heavy brown moustache, no beard or whiskers, strongly marked features, and eyes very keen, hard, and bright. He was well dressed, and looked as if he was, in City language, a substantial, or "warm" man, yet not in the least like any City man they had ever encountered. He looked round the room, resting his eye first for a moment on Copernica, but, as if dissatisfied with the spectacles, he turned to Milly. Then he stepped forward and held out his hand, saying coldly, "I suppose you are my daughter!"

She sprang forward, and fell into his arms with a cry of surprise and joy. Her father at last!

Her father! Then her Fortune had come home. The boys looked straight before them, with tightness in their throats. Copernica wept silently: the mother wept loudly. Only George seemed discontented.

"My daughter," the stranger repeated coldly, and disengaging himself from her arms without so much as kissing her. "Yes, it is natural after all these years. I suppose I might have expected to be hugged. That will do, Milly. I suppose I must call you Milly. Of course, I was hardly prepared, I must own, Mr. Ab—Ambler, for such a—in fact, I could not have believed that you were so well-grown a girl. However—yes, my dear, it is your father. You did not expect to see me, perhaps?"

"You have been silent for four long years," she replied. "How could I——"

"True, true; we will talk of that another time. You have been living here, I suppose. And this is Mr. Ambler; and—ah!—Mrs. Ambler; and—ah!—the family Amblers."

"These," said Milly, "are the kind friends, and the boys and girls I have told you of in my letters so often."

"You have, my—my dear." Strange that the adjective should

seem so hard to say. "You certainly have. Your letters are all in my pocket at this moment. They have never left me, I assure you."

"Oh, father!"

"Never, my—ahem!—my dear. I have read some of them—ahem!—more than once."

Between having letters always in your pocket and reading them more than once there seems a wide gap.

Milly's eyes dropped.

"Well, my daughter?" He hesitated and looked round. "As it is evening, and a little late, and I have to get back to the West End, and—and—is there anything you wish to say before I go? Of course we shall meet again to-morrow or next day, or—or—in fact, you will study your own convenience. As regards future arrangements, I do not suppose that I shall go back to America for a few weeks; but of that we can speak afterwards. So, for the present——"

"Stay, father, one moment!" The girl took George's hand, while the rest looked at each other bewildered. Was this the kind of meeting one would dream of between father and daughter after twenty years' separation? "This," said Milly, "is George Ambrose, my lover. We are going to be married."

Mr. Montoro slowly put up a pair of eye-glasses, and looked at George from head to foot.

"Not so fast," he said, "not so fast. You have a father, whose permission—— May I ask you, sir, what is your profession?"

"I am at present a clerk in a chemical works," said George, hot and red.

"A clerk—a mere clerk! My—ahem!—my daughter, we will speak of this afterwards."

"You were a clerk yourself once," said George in a quiet rage, while the two elder boys murmured, because they too were clerks.

"What the devil do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Montoro fiercely. "How dare you say that I was once a clerk!"

"If you are ashamed of it," said George, "I shall certainly not remind you of the fact again. I am not ashamed of beginning as a clerk. Perhaps I shall rise out of it."

Here was a pretty beginning. Milly looked in consternation from her father to her lover. Why did her father fall into such sudden and violent wrath? Everybody knew he had been a clerk, and had gone away and made his Fortune. However, he recovered as quickly, and deigning no further reply to the unlucky lover, turned to his daughter.

"We will talk, Milly," he said, with a coldness of voice which fell upon her heart like ice—"we will talk of these things another time. Meantime, I have found out where you live, which is a disgusting distance from anywhere. I shall probably call here again to-morrow afternoon. Meantime—ah!—good-night."

He gave her his hand without offering to kiss her, and retired without another word.

Mr. Ambler had the presence of mind to follow him and catch him by the arm.

"Pardon me, sir—one word, if only to satisfy the neighbours. Your Glorious Fortune, of which we have heard so much, is it—is it safe? Is all well with it?"

"Quite safe," Mr. Montoro replied. "It is," he added with a grin, "just exactly as safe as it always has been—on as sound a basis, and as gigantic. I thought you would want to know first thing about the Fortune. And as to neighbours, be good enough to tell them that I don't want to know 'em, and I won't know 'em, and I won't see 'em. What I am going to do about Milly I cannot just yet tell you: perhaps I have not made up my mind. But hark ye, Mr. Addlepate, or whatever your name is——"

"Ambler, sir—Reginald Ambler, the Discoverer of——"

"Remember, I will have no neighbours here. Perhaps I may have been a clerk myself in the old days. Perhaps I am not too anxious to have them recalled. Keep them out of my way, do you hear?"

He opened the door, walked noisily down the gravel, got into his cab, and drove away.

"Oh, good gracious!" cried Mrs. Ambler. "My poor—poor child! Did anyone ever hear or see such a thing?"

"Oh, poor Milly!" said Copernica, kissing her until the spectacles scratched her cheek.

"But the letters he used to write!" said Milly. "I cannot understand it. What has changed him? Not one kind word! and the letters so full of sweet things! And—oh, George!"

"Never mind me, dear," said George hoarsely.

"But I must mind you. You are to come first, not my father. He must not upset my life. Yes, I know about the fifth commandment, but that can't be meant for fathers who stay away twenty years." She looked determined. "Go now, George; it is getting late. Go, dear, and trust me."

"I wish," said Mr. Ambler, "I do wish that he had been shown first into the map-room. If he had understood, even a little, under what a roof his daughter has been brought up, he would have approached the question of—of George—with a little more feeling. I say nothing about the Truth. That may, or may not, come afterwards. He looked as if he might become an Enquirer. But we should have impressed him first. We did wrong. We should have impressed him first of all, with the maps, the charts, and the working models."

IV.

A WARM WELCOME.

An interval of fifteen years for moral refreshment is a good spell. Unfortunately, whether the time be passed in the neighbourhood of Weymouth, or on Dartmoor, or in the New World, the patient, on his return to society, generally finds that his finer qualities, to remember which has probably been his chief comfort in exile, are all clean forgotten, and only those little episodes which necessitated his departure are now remembered.

The extraordinary vitality of disagreeable things has never yet been treated seriously. A man shall be your most delightful companion for years, your bosom friend and confidant; he then, perhaps, forges your name—only once; steals your money—is only found out once; cheats at cards—and is only once detected; embezzles his employer's money—but is only once discovered, and therefore is compelled to seek retirement for a while. On his return it is excessively annoying to find that nothing is remembered except the misfortune which separated him from his friends.

In a better state of things the patient will be welcomed back as one who has been suffering from some brain disorder, the treatment of which is understood. He will be considered perfectly recovered, and be even ostentatiously trusted with cheques payable to order, bags of gold, and heaps of postal orders; he will be invited to play cards in the most highly moral circles; he will be begged to take care of money belonging to the Church, or the neediest widow, or the most helpless orphans, and in every way be made to feel that his disease is completely cured.

This, I am sorry to say, was not the treatment received by the Colonel on his return to England, which followed very shortly after his departure from Oregon. He was in a somewhat delicate position, because he was unable to know how far the reasons of his exile were understood by his old associates. Now, if a man simply disappears and remains a "vanished hand" for a period of years, society has certainly no right to question that man's own version of his story, or to entertain injurious suspicions, or to spread malicious reports. There are many instances on record of such re-appearances, and I have never heard that the adventures related by the man supposed to have gone under for good have been seriously doubted, whether he declares that he was wrecked on a desert island, married to an Amazon in the heart of the Dark Continent, carried off by friendly gorillas, or compelled to wander among Patagonians, Guachos, and Aztecs. But things are different where nasty stories survive, as the Colonel experienced.

His name, while he was yet in English society, was Percival Brooke West; he was a gentleman by birth, and the only son of his

mother, who was a widow. By what extravagances, selfish indulgences, wanton wastings, profligacies, and prodigal-son business, he ran through his patrimony; hardened his heart; deadened his conscience; lost his taste for any pleasures which were not highly flavoured, peppered, and cabob-curried; destroyed the sense of honour, and converted himself into a man-eating tiger, it needs not here to relate. Nor need we here even indicate the path by which a plunging youth becomes a profligate and ruined man. Nor need we pause to tell the story of what he did. He "did something" many times, but at the last he was discovered. And then he retired—disappeared, became the "vanished hand" at the card-table, and the "voice that is still" in the smoking-room. The world went on without him, and, for fifteen years, the racecourse, the club, the streets of the West End knew him no longer, and without him the old game went on merrily—the young fellows on the "unlimited chuck," the hawks hovering over the pigeons, and ever and anon another young fellow "doing something" and speedily disappearing.

Then he returned.

Before Mr. Percival Brooke West showed himself in the old haunts—before, in fact, he took passage from New York, he cut off his beard, dyed his hair and moustache brown, and dressed himself in raiment as youthful as a man near fifty, who wishes to pass for five-and-thirty, can venture upon. He took up his quarters in a good Bond Street hotel, and he then considered which of his old friends he should first attempt. Naturally he chose the ones who had been in the same "swim" with himself—that plunging, headlong, exhilarating swim down the rapids, with the beautiful whirlpool at the end, reported to have sucked many a stout swimmer beneath its boiling waters. Had not he himself—— ?

He remembered seven or eight of the old set and sat down to write to them. The letters were really models. No polite letter-writer could have taught him more artfully to convey the strength and enduring warmth of his old friendship, his own joy at his return, and his eager looking forward to another meeting. He also contrived to let it be understood that his financial position was extraordinarily sound, and that feasting would come into fashion again.

He forgot that in fifteen years such a set as his would most certainly have fallen all to pieces—first, because the pace could not continue; and secondly, because many of the men, younger than himself, would leave it in order to enter seriously upon the pursuit of a career. There are really very few who continue in the resolute pursuit of pleasure until past middle life, even though the ashes of the Dead Sea apples have got into their throats, and made them cough and choke.

The letters despatched, he walked about the streets waiting for answers. The dear old streets! Heavens! how delightful to be back again among them, even with so moderate a sum as eight

hundred pounds to spend! But it would be enough, perhaps, to procure him readmission into the old circles, with such share in the riot of the Fool's Paradise as a man of fifty may look for.

After two days he got one answer—the first and the only one. It was from a dear and old friend, and a follower of his own way of thinking. The writer said that he rejoiced to receive so friendly a letter, because he had long thought he had no friends left at all; that he had been for a good while quite down on his luck, and was now stone-broke; but that he had a wife and family to support, and in these his wretched and impoverished circumstances he knew not where to look even for food for them; that he was ill, moreover, and like to die—with a good deal more to the same effect, concluding with the remark that they had both had misfortunes of the same kind, and ought to feel for each other. ("What the deuce does he mean?" asked the reader.) Wherefore a temporary advance would be most thankfully accepted, and a reply to this note would be expected with the fullest confidence and hope.

I am obliged to own that Mr. Brooke West tore this letter up in a rage.

"Confound the fellow! What did he mean by 'the same misfortune'? Stone-broke, was he? Let him starve!"

But there came no more answers to his letters. Therefore he resolved upon calling on his old friends, though with some misgivings.

"The same misfortune!" What did the impudent beggar and pauper mean?

One of the old set was a partner in a City house; another was a barrister; a third, a fourth, and a fifth had once been officers in the army, and so on. He would call—he would find out if they intended to be nasty about a thing now fifteen years old—if, indeed, they knew of it.

The results of his visits illustrated in a very surprising manner the tendency which I have already deplored. That is to say, no one was in the least disposed to forget that thing, which they knew perfectly well, and coupled with his memory as indelibly as the sailor associates an anchor with the skin of his arm. And yet remark that he, the man chiefly concerned, was as willing to bury it and have done with it, as the Red Indians are, in time of peace, to bury a tomahawk!

I have often wondered if that tomahawk was always expended in the funeral service, or whether it was sometimes dug up by a Resurrection brave and traded away for what it would fetch in whisky.

It is a dreadful story of outrage and humiliation.

First, Mr. Brooke West went to call upon his old friend the partner in the City house. No one in his younger days had carried on the game with greater eagerness than the frolicsome young

merchant-adventurer; surely this man, at least, would be glad to welcome his old friend.

Was he glad? Not at all. On the contrary, it appeared that he was very sorry. When he got Mr. Brooke West's card, which was sent in to him, this merchant, no longer frolicsome, but now quite sober and dignified, turned very red in the cheeks—they were most respectable cheeks now, as ready to blush at wickedness as the cheek of the young person, and regularly seen every Sunday at church—said strong things about the unqualified impudence of disgraced swindlers, and sent out word that if the caller and owner of the card did not instantly leave that office, he was without delay to be driven and kicked down the stairs by the united efforts of the clerks.

Mr. Brooke West received this message, delivered in its integrity, without making any reply or attempt at justification. For a moment his eyes flashed and he clenched his fists, so that the clerk, who glibly delivered the reply, quailed and turned pale; then, without a word, he walked away. It is the worst of such a situation that a man cannot afford the luxury of a row, else he would have gone for that irreproachable merchant.

Next he went, but with much less confidence, to call upon another old pal, a barrister in the Temple. He was a man who had got on in his profession, thought of taking silk, gambled no more, had forgotten the ways of iniquity and its wages, was married and lived on Campden Hill, and the memory of his younger days, when it came back to him, was no longer a thing he loved to dwell upon.

He, too, on receiving the card, jumped in his chair, used strong words, tore up the card, and sent an insulting message that he had nothing whatever to say to Mr. Brooke West, and refused to see him.

Again the Colonel walked away without reply; but I think that, had he got that respectable merchant and that successful lawyer on the Embankment in the evening, two distinct flops or splashes would have been presently heard in the river; or had he met either of them on a lonely heath after dark, there would have been a lively dance, with steps not described in the books.

Next, he went to his old club, where he found a new hall-porter, who did not know him. First, he asked for his old friend Captain Pacer. Alas! the gallant captain was dead this many a long year. Then for Major Fauchelevent, another of the glorious band of revellers. Why, the major had left the club a long time; had been, in fact, expelled from it. Then he asked for Colonel Cassade. This member, now General Cassade, was actually in the club at that moment. Mr. Brooke West sent up his card, and waited with pale face, and lips that trembled a little. In two minutes the general himself came down the stairs, leaning heavily on his stick, grey-haired, red-faced, gouty. And as for greeting, friendly smile, hand-shaking, and a cordial welcome home!—when the returned

prodigal held out his hand, advancing with a genial smile, though an uncertain eye, and said with hearty smile, "Old fellow! How goes it?" the gallant officer, standing in the middle of the hall, banged his stick on the floor, so that the panes in the windows shook for fear, and every pair of tongs jumped, and most of the glasses in the house fell into small fragments, and asked with purple cheeks and furious eyes, and a stentorian voice, what in the name of this and of that—words which find their fittest home on the banks of the silver Thames, and especially at Richmond, or beside the stalls of Billingsgate—what he meant by his confounded impudence? A fellow who was expelled—actually expelled—that very same club, daring to send up his impudent card, to call upon him, the general!

"Turn him out, hall-porter—do you hear?" he cried. "Turn him out into the street! Knock him down if he ventures to call again! Turn him out, I say!"

This last blow left no room for hope. That part of the world—after all, a very small one—was closed. As a matter of fact, Mr. Brooke West did not know until then that he had been expelled the club. He thought that perhaps a kindly interpretation of certain fishy transactions, which had led to his exile, might have been laid before the committee. Well, that was done; he must try something else. As for making a scene or having a row, that was out of the question. He changed his hotel; he went to the Langham, where there are generally more Americans than English. There was little fear that anybody there would recognise him for what he had been in the Southern or Western States. He was now the English gentleman, who had travelled and lost some of the national prejudice and reserve. And here he stayed for six months and more. He began to make acquaintances, and presently forced his way to certain places where play—good, honest, high play—is to be had, whether baccarat, napoleon, hazard, monté, euchre, poker, or the simple roulette. He found there were still plenty of hawks about, and pigeons harder than ever to catch and pluck; but he did pretty well.

I do not know how or when it was that he first thought of Montoro's daughter. By accident he carried off her letters with the bank-notes. Now and then he turned them over in his portmanteau. "My dearest Father," they began, and after eight pages at least of gossip, they ended, "Your most affectionate and loving daughter, Milly Montoro." There was property—she spoke about "the houses." The poor creature, her father, had spoken of certain houses. Gradually he came to think upon this property more and more. It was almost certainly her father's property; it was not likely that it was settled upon the girl. Could not he get that property? It was a little thing, but it might be of immense service to him. And the thought came to fill his brain, as the thought of Naboth's vineyard filled the brain of Ahab. But there was only

one way to get it—only one way to get that property; viz., boldly to assume the name of the man he had robbed; to see as little as possible of the girl and her relatives; and to sell the property for what it would fetch, put the money in his own pocket, and go away with it. As for the girl, she would find something to do; young people can always work. And houses worth a hundred and fifty pounds a year can be sold for something—two thousand pounds, or perhaps more. Two thousand pounds! But then to become a Claimant—to assume another man's personality!

The longer he pondered over this idea the more it pleased him. As for difficulties, there were, so far as he could see, few, so long as he kept out of the way of Montoro's cousins and relations; he could show an exact knowledge of the life led by the girl who had told her father everything; he had her letters; he knew the scrambling household, the enthusiast and visionary, the sons who had no chance at home and longed for one abroad—everything. He knew, or guessed, what kind of letters the man who had made so enormous a fortune sent to his daughter; they were vague letters, full of splendours and hazy glories, about which he could build any structure he pleased. Everything was ready to his hand, provided only there was no one to swear that he could not be the lost Montoro. Here again he was helped, though he admitted to himself that it was the one serious risk. The girl's relations neglected her altogether. They never made any inquiry about her; her father's people, who belonged to quite the lower class of clerks, were scattered and dispersed, and too much occupied with their own troubles to ask what had become of Charles's girl; her mother's sister, she who had married into "carriage company," had gone on up the hill of fortune, and was now, with her husband, so rich that she had a great house at Wimbledon, with more than one carriage, and contented herself with writing to her niece once a year or so. The very people in whose house she lived knew nothing of her father; nothing was wanted to carry through the business but swiftness and courage—a rush and a bold front. If, in the interval, which must be brief, between the first appearance and the last, cousins should offer to renew cousinly acquaintance, those cousins must be insulted and snubbed. The thing could be done safely if it were done quickly. And though it was impossible to foresee all the difficulties which might arise, he could provide against most. Freedom and skill in lying, it seemed to him, were the first essentials. And so far he was the equal of any living man.

You have seen how he made his first appearance. It was after dark; if, peradventure, there was anyone who might have known Montoro in the old days, then was there time to prepare that person for a change in appearance, manner, and voice; he did not assume the manner of the affectionate and tender parent; he could not, in the first place, and in the next, it was better for his purposes to be

the hard and stern father. He was astonished, certainly, at his daughter's embrace, having forgotten that girls do kiss their fathers; but on the whole he was satisfied. So far he had been accepted without the slightest suspicion.

The next day he drove to Veritas Villa in the afternoon. His daughter came to him, but on this occasion she did not offer to throw herself into his arms; he held out his hand coldly, and she took it as coldly, though she had been crying all the night over this disappointment of a father. Many a woman cries over a disappointing son, but few have to lament that a father does not turn out as he had been expected. Perhaps she had allowed her imagination too much freedom. All she had to go upon were his letters, and these spoke to her of a writer very different from this cold man with the hard eyes.

"Let us talk," he said. "There is a good deal to say. Let me see, Milly is your name, is it not? Yes—Milly, to be sure—Milly." He wondered if it was Emily, Amelia, Millicent, Matilda, or something else. "It is strange, at first, talking to my own daughter."

"You did not find it strange writing to her."

"No, that was different. Did you expect to find your father what he is?"

"I did not," said Milly truthfully.

"You took me at your mother's estimate. I believe she told you I was a meek and gentle nature. Perhaps, in those days, I was. If a man wants to get on, over there, mind you, he must get rid of his meekness. So, that is the first thing I have to say. Next, I am accustomed to have my own way. Please remember that. Perhaps you thought when I came home you would have it all your way. Not so fast, young lady."

Milly said nothing; but a red flush on either cheek might have told him, had he remembered Matilda, that she was her mother's daughter.

"When your mother died, you left Hackney Wick. Lord! what a place to live in! Where was it that you lived in Hackney Wick?"

"Why," said the girl, surprised, "in the old house, of course, where you lived until you went away."

"To be sure—the old house; the old house in Hackney Wick. And then you came here?"

"Mr. Richard Ambler, who managed the houses, suggested his cousin to my aunt, when they wanted some one to take care of me."

"Richard—Richard Ambler," he stroked his chin. "Do I remember him?"

"No, I should think not. He told me once he had never seen you."

"Good. I will go to see him then. Write down his address. He manages the houses, does he? We will walk round some day and see the old place. Are there any of my old friends left to see you sometimes?"

She shook her head.

"I think I have never seen any of your old friends or relations at all. I do not know where they are."

"Nor do I," he said, with perfect truth. "We shall not trouble ourselves much to find them, that is very certain. And your mother's people?"

"They now live at Wimbledon, a long way off; and I seldom see my aunt Paulina or my cousins. I do not think anybody cares very much about me, except the Amblers here."

"Very good," her father replied. "They keep away from you so long as you are poor, do they? Then we will keep away from them now that we are rich. As for me, remember that I refuse to see cousins of this kind. Absolutely refuse, mind!"

He looked so fierce—so needlessly fierce—that Milly was frightened. Certainly this new father of hers was not one to be crossed.

"When I went away," he said presently, "when I gave up the post I held in the firm of—— What the devil now was the name of the people?"

Milly shook her head. She did not know.

"I think the least you could have done," he replied angrily, "was to make yourself acquainted with the history of your own father. Never mind. What did you care about your father? When I went away your mother had about a hundred and fifty pounds a year—some trifle——"

"She lived upon it, trifle though you call it, until she died, since you sent her nothing, and I have lived upon it since," said Milly quickly.

"Yes, yes—I know. What is it worth now?"

"The houses are all let, and they produce, I believe, after allowing for repairs, about a hundred and eighty pounds a year. This is all paid to Mr. Ambler for my maintenance, education, and dress."

"A very handsome sum, upon my word! A hundred and eighty pounds a year! It should have been eighty, that would have been quite enough, and the rest saved for me."

"For you? But the property was my mother's, who left it to me!"

"Did she make any will?"

"No; there was no need. Nobody else could take her property."

"You forget her husband. There were no settlements;" he did not at all know whether there were any or not, but he assumed that there were none. "All your mother's effects were therefore, and are still, mine."

His! Milly trembled—was she to lose her little property—the property which was going to do so much for the home when she married George?

"Fortunately," she said timidly, "you are so rich that you do not want it!"

"Rich! yes; but no man refuses money, or can afford to throw it away. As for those houses—see, girl," he rose and walked to the

window, "it is as well to understand at once—I have come over here at great loss of time and money, leaving enormous affairs—affairs of the very greatest importance, in the hands of people I only half trust, for you. I cannot stay long, there is nothing for me to do here; I have got no friends in England; I am out of the world; and there is no getting back to the old life."

"Getting back to the old life!" Milly stared and gasped. She pretty well knew what the old life was, with penniless brother-clerks for companions, and the bar-parlour for club; "the old life!"

"Of course; when I said the old life, I mean the old friends."

"Would you care to meet them again—those old friends of yours?"

Milly remembered her mother's lamentations over the memory of those old friends who took her husband from his home, led him into taverns, drank with him, and made him smoke too much tobacco; initiated him into the Orders and Brotherhoods of Ancient Buffaloes, Druids, Shepherds, Odd-Fellows, or even Free and Accepted Masons. Her husband's love of low life, she said, coupled with his lack of ambition, was the bane of her married life. Perhaps she exaggerated.

"As for the friends," her father replied, "if they have gone on in the old way, I don't want to meet them. When a man gets up in the world, the first thing he should do is to kick away the ladder, and not know one of 'em. As for the old life, I don't suppose I ever want to hear about that again. Why, I was a clerk in the City; I had to go and write all day. A pretty kind of life mine was: at a desk all day, and your mother's tongue in the evening. Very well, then. Don't interrupt. There is nothing to keep me here. I shall sell the property, and we will go back together; father and daughter ought not to be separated: I suppose there is no particular reason why you should stay here, is there?"

"There is George," she replied.

"Your sweetheart? The chemist's clerk? You may leave me to settle with him. About this Ambler fellow, this jackass with the Discovery, has he got any money, or do you keep him and all his family, too?"

"He has a small fortune; I know what it is, because I have heard over and over again. He has five thousand pounds in the Three per Cents."

"Of course, then, he is mighty fond of you with your hundred and eighty. Why, it is as good as doubling his income. Go, tell him, if he is in the house, that I want to see him."

"Father," said Milly, standing before him, and looking him straight in the face, "there is one thing in which you must please understand me at once. I can never give up George."

"Not even to go back with me—your own father?"

"Not even that. I do not think, in any case, even without George, I could go back with you."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because—" she was a perfectly truthful girl, and she therefore spoke exactly what was in her mind—"because I am afraid of you. Your letters prepared me for something very different. You are cold and harsh: you begin with taking away my property—my own, although you are so rich that you despise it for being such a very little property. I cannot prevent you, I suppose. But I will not go back to America with you, and I will not give up Geo——"

She broke down—her voice choked: she fled because she would not let this hard father of hers see that he had made her cry.

"It is rather more serious work than I anticipated," said the Claimant to himself. "It makes a man respect the stage-father. I suppose she expected to be kissed and cuddled and made much of. Well—I can't do it. As for George, I think it is a deuced lucky thing there is a George, because she's a creature with a will of her own—not like her fool of a father—and she certainly will not give up her lover for a dozen fathers. So much the better for me. Because now I can sell up the property, and go away openly, without concerning myself about an undutiful child who prefers to remain with her George. It is better than running away. I am really very pleased there is a George. Bless them both! Suppose she had thrown herself upon my bosom and swore never to leave her fond and faithful father!"

At supper that evening, Mr. Ambler could talk of nothing but Mr. Montoro, who had spent two hours with him in the map-room, and had been most affable and kind.

"Before speaking of the business in hand, which was, of course, you, Milly, my dear, he engaged in conversation concerning the Great Discovery. I found in him one of those candid intellects, keen, incisive, logical, and open to conviction. Nothing of prejudice about Mr. Montoro. He has been brought up, he confesses, in the old exploded school, and has always been taught that the earth was round: he was, indeed, greatly surprised to learn that it is, on the other hand, flat, with a surrounding Rim of ice. I begged him not to take my simple word for it, but to listen, first, to the arguments. Well, he sat down. First, I gave him my Plain Reasons—these shook him. Then he answered, one after another, my Simple Questions, and I flatter myself conviction was growing in. Then I read him the Refutation, which he put in his pocket, and promised to see me again upon the matter.

"Then he began to talk about his own affairs. Milly, he is immensely rich, he is a millionnaire over and over again. I can hardly tell you what he has; there are mines, cattle-runs, farms, houses—one whole town belongs to him, he says. Think of it! What a glorious country it must be for a man in less than twenty years to accumulate such wealth! I think I have made a Recruit of the very first water—a Crœsus among Recruits. Hitherto, what

we lacked in money we made up in logic. Perhaps now we shall get both money and logic.

"He spoke, among other things, of a college or university, I forget which, in this city of his. It was built and is owned entirely by himself. He said, that among other professional chairs there is a chair of astronomy worth a thousand a year or so, and that it is, by great good luck, at present vacant. He has this appointment in his own gift. If, he added, he is quite satisfied with the new Discovery as to which he was already favourably prepared by his daughter's letters—thank you, Milly, my dear, you are always our guardian angel"—Milly looked horribly guilty—"he sees no reason why I should not fill that chair."

"Oh, Lord!" cried George.

"Eh, my dear?—eh, boys?"

"Where did he say it is?" asked George, "A thousand a year! In his own gift? And in America?"

"He did not say where. We were only discussing preliminaries, and I do think, children, that the name of Professor Ambler—no longer plain Reginald Ambler—on a title-page will carry weight, whether it is the title-page of the Plain Reasons, or the Simple Questions."

But Milly's cheeks were burning because she had never spoken of her guardian's Discovery with respect, in any letter to her father. What did he want to deceive Mr. Ambler for in so trifling a matter? And with all this wealth, why—why should he desire to take from her the little property which would be so useful to George and herself? Was it to make her an heiress?

"George," she said that night when she dismissed him at the garden gate, "I do not want his riches; I wish he would go away and leave me. Oh, George, I do not feel the least speck of love for him!"

V.

A BEAUTIFUL DREAM.

So far, things had gone so easily with this Pretender, that he began seriously to wonder why—considering the vast number of lost cousins, missing parents, strayed brothers, and wandering uncles—claimants like himself for the family affection, family friends, and family funds do not continually turn up. Perhaps they do. Perhaps there are hundreds among us—unsuspecting innocents—bearing names to which they are not entitled, and enjoying fortunes in which they have no right. What is to prevent a man who knows the circumstances to march into the club of a dead man, for instance, supposing he alone knows that the man is dead, and taking up his membership?

Our Claimant went to the villa again next day, and the day after.

The girl, who thought she was his daughter, attracted him. She looked so pretty that he could not choose but come. And after fifteen years the sight of a young and beautiful English girl is something, even to a hardened, selfish old gambler. She behaved nicely to him, was respectful in her language, and obedient, save in the matter of that young fellow.

"Milly," he said at the fourth visit—he was already so far advanced, that he called the girl by her Christian name, and even addressed her as "my dear," and "my child," without stammering or hesitation—"Milly, we are getting on better. Are you still afraid of me?"

"How can I help being afraid of you?" she replied truthfully. "You want to take me away from my friends, and from my lover; and you are going to take away what I thought was my property."

"Oh, your property! Silly child! Why, across the ocean, for every pound you have here, you shall get a hundred. Your property! Why, it is because I want to have done with the place altogether that I wish to sell it. Never heed such a trifle. Now tell me—do you like society?"

"I do not know—we have no friends. I believe there is very good society at Stamford Hill; but we never go anywhere."

"Do you like theatres?"

"I do not know; we never go to any."

"Do you like concerts?"

"Oh yes! I have been to a good many concerts, and there are lectures and dissolving views."

"Do you like the West End?"

"I have never been there. You do not know us yet—we are very quiet people: we are always at home working for the children."

"Yes," her father was grown softer in his manner, though he was no whit more demonstrative or affectionate: "ye—yes," he said, stroking his moustache: "all these things you know nothing of; "but you would love them if you knew them. Milly, without society there is no life: without excitement there is no life. You miserable people here do not live; you sit all together in a room, you breathe and walk in a cage; you know nothing about the world; you have no idea of its pleasures. If you marry this young clerk, you will go on breathing and walking in a cage. Why, it fills me with amazement that you can go on contentedly with this suburban life: and yet there must be millions all living like this."

"Why not? It is a very pleasant life. I think I would rather not have the excitement you speak of."

"Come with me, Milly," said her father, his face actually softening, "and you shall have a life which shall give you one pleasure after another—every day crowded and filled up with pleasures."

But she shook her head.

"I was thankful for George at first," he said to himself. "I thought it would rid me of the girl. Now I see I was a fool, for

I could do much better with her than without her. But how to persuade her ?"

For by this time another thought was lying in his brain, receiving every day new food and encouragement. He saw, in a kind of ecstatic vision, a salon or drawing-room such as he had read of in the old days when he used to read French novels. It was a beautifully furnished room, with cabinets, china, pictures, a piano, mirrors, and all the pretty things which belong to the life he had abandoned fifteen years ago. He sighed as he thought of such a room. "I did not know," he said, "until I came home, that I cared for it all so much." The room was full of people ; there were ladies in beautiful toilettes, young men in evening dress. They were sitting, walking, and talking. He was himself a gentleman again to outward show. At the piano sat the girl—he always thought of Milly as the girl—playing and singing, the younger men hovering round her, making their court. Presently she rose, said something, and laughed, and they all sat down to a table covered with green cloth, he at the head.

Yes, the Colonel was not in imagination returning to paths of virtue, which, whether they led him into pleasant drawing-rooms or not, would certainly prove monotonous to him. It filled his soul with happiness, however, to think that he could fill a room with people "comme il faut," through the attractions of his daughter, and do a stroke of business with them afterwards. The perfect gambler can think of nothing as complete, unless there are a pack of cards in it and a green table.

There was also another dream which much he loved, yet sometimes feared might be difficult to realize. In this dream there was one young man only in the room besides the girl and himself. The young man was often changed, because the evening was made expensive for him. And in this dream there was a mirror before the piano, in which the girl saw the hand held by the young man when the flirting and singing were over and play began. Then, by a judicious arrangement of chords, she conveyed to her confederate the knowledge of that hand ; or else she got up and looked over his shoulder, while that innocent sheep's eyes looked up into her artless face. Oh, a beautiful dream ! But before it could become possible two things were necessary : the girl must be across the water, and away from her friends, and she must be made to love a life of luxury and ease.

"Good Heavens !" he cried, "what a chance there is for me ! They've tried it with their painted and ruddled old hacks, their Frenchwomen and their octoroons, but never once, I swear, with a sweet-faced, innocent-looking English girl. They couldn't get one. As for difficulty, there would be none, once across the Atlantic, away from all her friends. As for doing her any harm, that is rubbish. Very likely she would fall in love—many young women do. I could get her off my hands that way without any trouble.

And, if not, why, then, when I had made all I want—it isn't really much—I could tell her everything, and pack her off to Johnny in Oregon. She'll console him for the loss of the money, which wasn't his any more than mine, and I shouldn't want her more than a year or two."

He forgot that, before you get an honest English girl to act as professional decoy to a card-sharper, there is likely to be a very considerable kind of row.

This dream remained in his mind so long that it became a purpose with him. He was growing old; it would be dreadful to give up the comfortable life to which he had returned, and yet what to do when the money went? He thought how easy and pleasant it would be to receive his friends in a real high-toned salon, with a pretty girl to play and sing to them, and help him to cheat them. She should go with him. As for her lover, he must be given up.

But first it was necessary to win her confidence. This he might have done very easily by the simple show of affection. The man could feign a good deal, but love, the plain and unmistakable love with which many foolish fathers wrap up and surround their daughters, he could not feign. Therefore he sought to win her confidence by dazzling her.

First, he took her to a splendid restaurant, and gave her a magnificent dinner, consisting of a dozen courses, served in a great room full of glass, mirrors, and flowers, with champagne, of which Milly had heard, but had never tasted.

"If you like," said her father, "you shall dine like this every night. Good Heavens! how have I longed in America for this kind of thing again—I mean in the first days, you know, before——"

"What, could you have known anything of this kind of life in the old days?"

"Perhaps," he said, after a while, "a clerk may get some knowledge of what a dinner should be by flattening his nose at the window."

"But," she went on, "to waste all this time and money every day in such a tedious——"

"Confound it!" he cried in a rage. "You are not worth such a dinner. After all, how should you understand it? A mutton-chop and a potato, I believe, would have pleased you quite as well."

Then he took her to a theatre. They sat in a private box, and Milly looked with wonder from the stage to the house, and the house to the stalls. The performance was a burlesque, and a favourite one. It was played partly by actresses dressed as men, and Milly pitied them, though the audience clapped and applauded. She could see nothing to applaud; you see, it wants a little education before a girl, a suburban and East End girl, can really admire the spectacle of women dressed in tights, or the performance of a

ballet, or the delivery of bad verses crammed with puns, or the comic business, which seems to them like horseplay. Such a girl does not see anything to laugh at in a pun, or in a funny get-up, or in a man tumbling down—for that matter, she does not want to laugh at all; she would like rather to cry, even, so long as she could see a beautiful story beautifully played. But this her father did not understand, and fell into a rage when he perceived that Milly was only bored with the performance. He thought she was sulking with him on account of his previous harshness.

"You shall have a private theatre of your own if you like, and a ballet and all, and you shall be manager," he said. "You shall act on your stage if you like; only say what you would like."

"I do not want any ballet, thank you," she replied coldly; "and I thought theatres were better worth going to."

"Oh, very well," he replied; "if you are resolved to like nothing I do for you, I might as well leave off trying to please you."

He was now in no hurry about going back. At first he spoke of going back in a few days, but he stayed on. It was a fortnight since he first came to the villa, and now he came every day, though Upper Clapton is not by any means "handy" for the Langham Hotel. He saw that the girl disliked him still, but that she was trying to conquer her dislike, and he went on with his plan of conciliation. He had expected suspicion; there was none in any quarter: he was even received by Mr. Richard Ambler, on whom he called to ask about his houses, without the least suspicion. What he had not expected, because he would not have reckoned it as a factor of the least importance, was dislike. Now, with this larger scheme in his mind, it was of the first importance that the girl should learn to trust in him and to believe him before getting her to obey him.

He therefore persisted. Since she did not care for the theatre, he took her to the races. He was rewarded by the consciousness that the girl was all day profoundly dejected. She did not want to see the horses running; she did not in the least care who won; and she was frightened at the great crowd, in which she felt so entirely out of place. Yet he had got a carriage, a hamper, and a most beautiful lunch, and was mindful of a day long past when with a similar carriage and hamper, but another companion, he had spent a most enjoyable day at Ascot.

He drank all the champagne himself—a little too much—and then began telling her stories which terrified her, and made her wonder what manner of life her father must have led before he married, since he was familiar with what seemed to her simple mind the most wicked and wasteful profligacy.

"Do you like no kind of amusement, then?" he asked her.

She tried to explain to him that there are many other amusements besides feasting, drinking, burlesques, racing, betting, and gambling, which might seem to girls pleasing and desirable things.

"Sometimes," she said, "on summer evenings I go upon the river with George, or we walk to Tottenham and as far as Hornsey. There are lectures to go to, and a choral society; then we have lawn-tennis, and sometimes there are new books to read, and new music to play."

Her father grunted.

Then he tried her with the shops of Regent Street. No woman, he thought, can withstand the temptation of fine things. He showed her all the beautiful things in the world, or nearly all—dainty costumes, costly with lace, bonnets which were a dream of loveliness, gloves and parasols, ribbons, and what not—such as the girl had never dreamed of possessing. She refused them—she actually refused them.

"George," she said, "is only a clerk as yet. If I were to go dressed in these beautiful things, it would make him ridiculous."

"George! What do I know about George? Are you not my daughter and my heiress? Can't you remember that? Sometimes one would think you were going out to America as a pauper. Do you really imagine that my daughter—mine!—could show herself in New York dressed like——"

"Like the daughter and the wife of a clerk. But perhaps the New York people will have no opportunity of giving an opinion."

"Was there ever before," asked her father impatiently, "a girl who was bound to inherit millions, and preferred—actually preferred—to go about as shabby as a shop-girl?"

"George is only a clerk," she said; "I must dress according to my husband's station."

"Why, hang it! are you not my heiress? Who will have my money if not you? One would think you were going out to America to be a governess."

"Forgive me," she said. "I have been so long accustomed to consider your Fortune as a thing which has nothing to do with me, that I cannot suddenly change my mind. If you designed to make me an heiress, you should have told me so ten years ago. Then, I dare say, I should have been brought up differently. And, perhaps, I should have liked these things. But I belong to the people whom you now despise, though you were born among them. We live the simple, homely life which you have forgotten. As for these things—your great dinners, your theatres, and all the rest of them, I suppose you enjoy them now. But in the old days you knew nothing of them. Had you not better leave me alone with my friends, just as you always have done? You do not want me in your new life. Why," she looked him full in the face with those honest eyes of hers, "there is something—I know not what—which stands between us. You do not love me as you used to do when you wrote to me, or else you can no longer pretend as you did then—but I cannot believe those letters were all pretence. When I am with you I irritate you, and then you fly into a rage and swear.

You try to please me with all kinds of things which I do not want——"

"What is it you do want?" he asked her. "What can I buy for you? Only tell me. See, Milly, I want you to like me. It isn't a question of money"—indeed it was not—"I will buy anything you fancy. But you won't like anything that I can say or do. As for those old letters of mine, bring them to me. Who is to remember what he said ten years ago—writing to a little schoolgirl?"

She brought them to him obediently. They were not many—only about twenty, all tied up neatly with green silk and smelling of lavender. He cut the string and read the letters deliberately. Remembering the log hut and the whisky-bottle, Johnny's wandering eyes and rambling speech, his miserable story and his wretched life, he was struck with admiration. The man possessed the first and most essential qualifications of a novelist—he could make those who read his letters believe his statements; more than this, he could enter into his reader's mind and understand what she would think of himself; what sort of hero she would construct of her father; and he wrote accordingly.

"I was a clever fellow," he said at length, "when I wrote those letters. Yes, Milly, there are many things in my life of which I may be proud, and many which might have to be explained away. You thought from these letters that it was all sailing before a fair wind. You are mistaken; it was a hard fight all the time with men as keen to get on as I was myself. Would you have liked me to tell you the true history of those years of struggle?"

"I should like," said Milly, "my father to be as affectionate and as tender to me in words as he was in writing."

He shook his head.

"It can't be, my child. If you like, I could write more letters to you, just the same as these. But I can't talk like that. Here, take back the things!"

"I do not want them any more," she replied sadly. "To read them now would give me more pain than pleasure. I would rather talk with you than have any more letters from you."

"Why, there," he replied; "that is exactly what I wanted you to say. No more humbugging milk-and-water letters, but good, honest, straightforward talk. You know me now, Milly, for what I am"—he stood upright and struck his chest—"a strong, plain man, and perhaps as good-hearted as if I came to you with tears and kisses. I am pleased with you—yes, satisfied and pleased. You are a very pretty, well-set-up girl, good face, good figure, good form. You will do. You don't pretend to love your father; very well, how should you? And you are not afraid to tell him so. I like you the better for it. Some day, perhaps, you will like me. Meantime, as you are my daughter, and are going to inherit everything, come out with me first to look at your inheritance."

Always the same refrain, "Come out with me."

He certainly made no pretence at being a mild and peaceful character, and filled the walls of Veritas Villa with tales which fired the blood of the boys, and made them long to rush beyond the reach of civilization, to ride the half-broken mustang, to shoot at Mexican robbers, to sleep round camp-fires, to wear a red flannel shirt, a crimson belt, a slouched hat, and great boots. Even Copernica thought that no woman could have a happier lot than to live in constant danger from scalping Indians and bloodthirsty Mexicans.

He laid himself out to please everybody except George, whom he treated with cold contempt, insomuch that the lover was fain to keep away from the house when Milly's father was there, and carried on his courtship in the garden. He conciliated Mrs. Ambler with smooth words and flatteries, assuring her that there was no lady in England who would have brought up his daughter with more care and kindness than she had shown, and that the boys and girls should always be his sacred care; and he gave them all watches, and to Copernica a gold watch and chain.

Yet they were afraid of him.

As for the Discoverer, Mr. Montoro became to him as a god, or pope at least, because he announced his adhesion to the theory, and admitted that he could no longer stand out against the overwhelming arguments in its favour.

"The world is flat," he said. "How thick it is, which we should see if we looked beyond the Outer Rim, it is impossible, as you say, for us to surmise. I have never taken any special interest in science, because my work has been of a more practical nature, but I hope I can follow an argument as well as other men; and your argument, Mr. Ambler, has convinced me."

"To win a Recruit, and such a Recruit," replied the blushing philosopher, "by the sheer force of persuasion is indeed a triumph."

Mr. Montoro then turned the conversation upon the subject of his college. It was a new college, he said; there would be, probably, at first, but a small number of students; the astronomical class would be one of the smallest. Still, it was an opening; the country was becoming settled and populated; the college was endowed; gradually the institution would grow. Would it really be worth Mr. Ambler's while to leave London and transport himself to a strange country in order to lecture on his own system in his own way?

Worth his while! The Discoverer bounded in his chair.

"Then, Mr. Ambler, I shall be pleased to offer you the post. It is my intention to leave this country for America in a few weeks. You can follow as soon after me as is possible for you to wind up your affairs."

"I have no affairs," replied the Philosopher. "There is the society, to be sure, but I am afraid that there is only one man, my

convert Bagshott, who will lament its temporary suspension. Bagshott leaves me the scientific department, and occupies himself with the weekly demonstration from his pulpit that the Discovery is the only way of reconciling revelation with science. The only way, Mr. Montoro! Such a man is useful to me, and I shall be sorry to leave him. They say his congregation has dwindled to nothing. But the scientific aspect of the question, which is my own special department, demands that such a chance of spreading the Truth should not be neglected. Where, sir, if I may ask, is your college situated?"

"It is," said Mr. Montoro, as unblushingly as if he had been Johnny of Oregon himself—"it is in Nevada, in the city which has risen on my own ground, surrounding my own works. You will not find it on any map, because the city has only been built two or three years. You go first to Colorado, and next—— But no matter for these details. They can wait."

It will be seen presently with what object the Colonel was deceiving the unfortunate Philosopher.

"Children," he said that evening, "the way is now clear to me. Should you like to go to Nevada?"

Nevada! Bret Harte's books were about Nevada, were they not? Nevada! where there are rocky mountains, grizzly bears, silver-mines, adventurers, wolves, buffaloes, prairies, rattlesnakes, perils and dangers, wealth, revolvers, bowie-knives, and happiness! Go to Nevada? Kepler looked at Tycho Brahe, and gasped. Ptolemy seized Galileo by the hand, and said, "Oh, oh!" slowly, and from his heart.

"Where is Nevada?" asked his wife.

"It is one of the newest of the States. It is the place where Mr. Montoro made his money. You did not know that, Milly?"

"No. I have never had any letters from Nevada."

"There he has built a city—it is only two years old—on his own grounds, and about his own works; and in the city is the college. I am offered—definitively and formally offered—the chair of astronomy. Shall I except the offer?"

There was a rapturous shout.

"Well, my children," he went on, "if it is ordained that I achieve the greatness in America, which Oxford and Cambridge refuse me, I hope that I shall accept it in a becoming spirit. As for you going with me, boys, I am sure that with Mr. Montoro's glorious example before us, and his patronage at starting, we need have no fear or hesitation."

And then there was such joy in the Ambler family as would have done your heart good only to see it, without understanding what it was about at all. To the elder boys it meant wealth unbounded, like Mr. Montoro's, but without so much temper; to the younger it meant change and fun—no doubt there were no schools in Nevada; to Copernica it meant justice—tardy, but still justice—to her father;

to the good wife it meant relief from tightness. Who would not go to Nevada for a thousand pounds a year?

Perhaps, too, they all thought there might come a time when there would be less talk about that Grand Discovery which made the family look upon all glory as vanity, so much had it spoiled and wasted the father's life.

It was now four weeks since Mr. Montoro's return. He had partly succeeded in reconciling Milly. She did not, it is true, venture again upon the mistake of kissing him, or of expecting any caresses from him; but she had overcome the repulsion which at first filled her soul with regard to him. Perhaps, if he had behaved more kindly with regard to George, she would have looked upon him with some approach to affection. What he wanted most, however, he had got from her. She trusted him; she did not in the least suspect him, and she was growing very nicely, and just as he could wish, to feel towards the great Fortune a personal interest. He felt sure that he could manage the rest very easily, once she was away from her friends. You do not, when you go a-tempting, approach the subject straight: you work round it; you talk about other things; you prepare the mind for it; you sap the ground; you gradually destroy principle; you do not, at last, make the last step till you are perfectly certain of success. The Colonel, who was a veritable serpent for craft and subtlety, knew that it would take time to convert an innocent girl into a rogue, thief, and confederate of cheats: but he knew what he was about, and he also knew from long experience that there are few so strong as to resist all kinds of temptation.

He now took his next step.

"I must tell you, Milly," he said with a touch of sorrow in his voice, "that I am now making my preparations to go back in a week—this day week. I have again seen Mr. Richard Ambler, and I hear that he can find me a purchaser for the houses, and will draw up the necessary papers immediately. You have heard that I have given Mr. Ambler a post in my college. He and his family will therefore start at once. This, if you persist in refusing to accompany me, deprives you of a home."

"I can find one with George."

"I shall not oppose it," said her father. "I might have looked higher for my daughter, but I will no longer oppose your inclinations. You shall marry the man of your choice, and I hope you will be happy. What you will do when you come into your Fortune I do not know. You will not, I fear, either of you, be equal to the position in which you will find yourselves. However, that is, after all, not my business, because I neglected you so long. It is my punishment that I cannot interfere as an ordinary parent might."

"You are very kind to me now," said Milly.

"You mean that I was not always. Perhaps not—perhaps not.

I did not know you, Milly, when first I landed, four weeks ago. Forgive me, my daughter!"

She looked at him in surprise. Strange that even when he was at his softest, using words which in other men would have been accompanied by some outward sign of tenderness, his eyes were as keen and his mouth as hard as if he were contemplating something connected with fight and struggle.

"Now, Milly, I have been thinking a good bit over things, and I am prepared to say to you, 'Go and marry your lover.' I will not ask you to give him up, and come across the water with me. I will even make a handsome allowance, which will enable you to live like a lady, if you please."

"Oh!" she replied, taking his hand. But he withdrew it quickly, as if afraid of her falling upon his neck again. "I did not expect this," she added. "What am I to say? How shall I thank you?"

"Nay, I want no thanks. There is only one thing you might do to pleasure your father."

"Why, is there anything, except giving up George, that I would not do?"

"It is this, Milly: You know I have been a long time from home, but I have never forgotten you; my letters prove that. Now, it grieves me to go back without even being able to show any of my kith or kin what I have done and the edifice I have raised. It is hard to have no one belonging to you. They will say when I go back, 'Colonel'—they call me Colonel, out there—'how did you find the little maid?'—that's you, Milly—that is you; and I shall have to tell them in reply that the little maid is grown up into a woman, who doesn't care about her father—why, how should she? it is not in reason that she should—and is going to be married to a lover in a low station of life. And there is not a creature in all the world who cares about me. It seems hard, doesn't it? What is the use of money if it can't bring me that kind of happiness?"

The tears came into Milly's eyes as she stood before her father and listened. They would have flowed more readily if his own had showed the least emotion.

"Then I thought to myself, suppose that Milly would come over with me for a year, or two years—not more. Suppose I were to promise her faithfully that after two years, at most, she should go back to her lover, if she pleased. It is not a very long time, two years. Milly is young; her lover is young. He may very well wait two years. Come, Milly, what do you say? A run across the ocean, a ride across the continent. First, Nevada for a year or so; then we will run over to California; perhaps go up country to—to Oregon," he laughed. "Yes, I should like to show you Oregon. I know people in Oregon who would interest you very much. And when you were tired of your father, and his great house, and all, you could come straight away back to your lover's arms. What do you say, Milly?"

She was silent, thinking. Was there ever a more reasonable or

more generous offer? He would let her do what she pleased, and only suggested, leaving the offer for her consideration, that she should give him two years of her society.

"I will consult George about it," she said at length.

"*Soit!* Let it be so. Consult this infallible George. Milly, one word of advice. Don't let George know that you think him infallible. It spoils a husband. Your mother never spoiled me in that way. Quite the contrary."

That evening George and Milly had a long and earnest talk. The proposal made by Mr. Montoro seemed really prompted by affection. After two years she might return to him. Was two years a great deal for a father to ask of his daughter? And then—one need not be quixotic, although one is a clerk in a chemical works, with prospects—there was all this great Fortune. No one doubted the existence of the Fortune, any more than they suspected Mr. Montoro of being somebody else. This Glorious Fortune! Her father might marry again: he might leave it away from his daughter: he might do anything with it. Surely it was worth a little concession to make that inheritance safe.

"I think, dear," he said at length, "I think—how can I part with you for two years?—that you ought to go."

"I think so, too, George. But I am afraid of him. I do not know why, but I am afraid of him. The Amblers will be with us. It is a great thing that Copernica is going. But I am afraid of him."

VI.

JOHNNY AGAIN.

MILLY must go, then. For two years she would be her father's companion. It was quite right and just: the proposal was put so generously that it was impossible to refuse. Yet George came away that night from Veritas Villa in great sadness and despondency. Milly was afraid of her father. Would he suffer her to return after two years? He was afraid of the man, too. He knew not why, but he was; the sight of Mr. Montoro filled him with a kind of rage. What business had such a man with such a daughter? Some wise men hold that daughters do take after, and resemble, more the father than the mother, which is an admirable thing when the character of the father is worth preserving and copying. But in what single respect did Milly resemble her father?

Filled with these thoughts, he did not at first perceive that there was a man wandering about in the middle of the road with unsteady gait, apparently the worse for drink, and looking for something. Presently this man made for him in a devious and zigzag course, and accosted him. His voice was a little thick, but he was not too drunk to express himself. He knew what he wanted.

"Sir," he said—in fact, he did say "shir," and he ran his words together a little, and missed a syllable here and there, and omitted many of the minor words, pronouns, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, and so forth. Let us hide these proofs of human frailty as much as possible, and print what he meant to say without dwelling too much on how he said it. We are all human, only some are more human than others. "Sir," he said, "can you tell me which is the house of Mr. Ambler?"

"Mr. Ambler's house?" George stared. "What do you want with Mr. Ambler? It is half-past ten, and they are all gone to bed. Come, you must wait to see Mr. Ambler till to-morrow. Do you want to prove that the world is square?"

The man shook his head.

"Must get up for me. Haven't seen her nigh twenty years."

"Seen whom?"

"Seen the little maid."

"What little maid?"

"My little maid—my daughter—Milly Montoro."

"What?"

"My little maid—my dear little maid," this strange person went on repeating.

Why, it was like the burden of Milly's father's letters. They were full of "my little maid, my dear little maid!"

"Who are you, then?" George seized him by the shoulder. "Stand up," he said, "try to be sober. Pretend to be sober, man. Who the devil are you, then?"

"I'm—I'm—her father: the little maid's father—Milly's father."

"Her father! What is your name, man?"

"My name is Montoro. The Colonel called me Johnny. Real Christian name—baptized name—is a fool of a name—Worshipful Charles."

"Good Lord!" cried George. "But you are drunk. Where do you come from?"

"The Commercial Docks, Rotherhithe. Came over from Quebec in timber ship. Was ship's cook."

"Look here," said George. "Whoever you are, you cannot go to the house to-night, because you are drunk, and because it is late. You must, therefore, come with me."

He took the man by the arm, and led him unresisting to his own lodgings, which were not far off.

"Now," he said, turning up the gas in the sitting-room, "let me look at you." He did look, and he trembled.

The man was dressed in an old and ill-fitting suit of black cloth. I do not think there is any kind of dress in which a man may look so fearfully shabby as a suit of black. This is partly due to the fact that it is evening dress, and should suggest social cheerfulness. In the same way, no one could possibly look more melancholy than a clown by daylight outside his show and in official dress. A dress-

coat, too, when it has grown old, and has seen long service in some third-class restaurant, falls into curves, lines, and folds which seem to debase and degrade the figure of man beneath. This man's whole suit, again, was disgracefully and deplorably dirty, and covered with streaks of grease. Everything was to match; he wore no collar, but had a red handkerchief tied about his neck, and a grey flannel shirt in rags; his hat was a slouched felt of the commonest description. He took off the hat and stood in the light, a little sobered, but his eyes were heavy with drink. They were light blue eyes, unsteady and weak. He wore a long greyish beard, but his hair was brown and silky. And the reason why George trembled was not because his clothes were so shabby, but because his face was like unto the face of his sweetheart, and his eyes like her eyes, though different in expression. The daughter was like the father, and he knew—he was perfectly certain—that before him stood the man whom the other pretended to be.

"Once more—who do you say you are?"

"Worshipful Charles Montoro is my name."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Oregon last," he replied, partly sobered by this young man's earnestness. "I came from Quebec in a timber vessel; shipped as cook."

"You came over here as cook? Where is all your money, then?"

The man shook his head.

"I haven't got any money," he replied. "There was some in the bunk; the Colonel stole it."

"Where is your Fortune, then?"

"I haven't got any Fortune. How should I have any?"

"What did you mean, then, by your letters?"

"My letters? Oh!" Then he put his hand to his head in a feeble way, trying to understand. Then he sat down looking bewildered. And presently, while George waited for further explanation, his head fell back and his eyes closed. He was asleep. And while he slept he looked still more like Milly.

The man slept all through the night, George mounting guard over him, lest he should wake up and slip away. By the morning light he looked more disreputable than ever. When he awoke at seven, George took him into his own bedroom, and gave him, to begin with, a completely new rig-out, in which, at all events, he presented a respectable appearance. The man was very much subdued, and asked no questions, taking what was offered him, and doing what he was told. Apparently a gentle and amenable person. Then George gave him breakfast, and after breakfast bade him tell his story.

I suppose there never was a man, since gift of speech was first granted to humanity, who rambled in his talk so much as Johnny of Oregon: what he had to tell we already know, but George did not. He got at last, and after a thousand twistings and turnings, to the point at which the Colonel came, stayed with him a week, proved

excellent company, and finally made off with the money and the letters. Then he went on:

"When the Colonel stole that money, and the letters as well, and I could not come up with him, nor hear of him anywheres, I hadn't the heart to go back to the clearin', and hung around a bit doin' odd jobs, as many are ready to do all over the States. And so somehow I worked my way back again to the east, and in the spring got to Quebec. Now when you stand on the hill at Quebec and look across to the east, it seems as if you can see all the way across the water to London. Curious that, isn't it? And what with havin' none of her letters to read, and lookin' across the water, and thinking I was gazing upon Hackney Wick, I fell to dreamin' about the little maid, and longin' to see her again."

"So you come home, and got drunk?"

"Yes, sir; that is so. Oh, I knew very well I should have to own up! And I knew what they would say; particularly Matilda's sister, P'leena, who married very well, and now keeps carriage company. It would be rough on the little maid at first to see her father such a disgraceful old pauper, and a shame to a respectable terrace to be seen loafin' around, after all I'd told her, too. First I thought I would just look over the palings like, and go away; somebody would tell me which of them she was; perhaps I'd beg a copper to carry away and remember her by. Then I thought how would it be if I made a clean breast and begged her pardon humble, and so went away again. All the journey across the ocean in that timber ship I thought about it, and what I should do. And when I got across to Poplar only this morning, I tell you, sir, I'd no more notion of what was best to be done than when I started."

"Perhaps you never have had any notion in all your life of what was best to be done."

"Perhaps not, sir. Men who see clear got on in the world. I never saw farther than the end of the job."

"But why did you get drunk?"

"Well, 'twasn't right; but think of it. I hadn't seen a public-house for nineteen years. They haven't got any where I've been. They've got bars; but if you want a comfortable drink, with a pipe and a friend to talk to, you must come to England. I don't quite know how many public-houses there are on the straight road between this and Poplar, but I tried the drink at most, with a pipe here and a pipe there, feelin' comfortable because I was workin' my way, you see, with the little maid at the end of the way."

"And so you got disgracefully drunk. Yes—I see."

There seemed no possibility of doubting or disputing the man's statements; they were told too naturally for deception. But what was to be done next?

"What is the Colonel like?"

Johnny described the man who had repaid his hospitality by stealing his money. He described him so exactly, that there was

little doubt in George's mind who was the personator, in spite of the discrepancies of beard and moustache.

"As for his profession, he's a sportsman," continued his informer. "He sometimes plays alone, and sometimes he's one of a gang. Sometimes he travels and plays in the cars; sometimes he goes to bars, and sometimes he keeps a gaming-saloon. There's thousands like him in the countries where I've been. Very good company they are when there's no plunderin' and cheatin' around. If there's a quarrel—which there mostly is—it's wild cats. I was a peaceful man, I was, and nobody never drew bead on me; but I've seen many a fight over the cards, and now and then a quiet man like myself got hit when the firin' begun. The best way is to roll over and lie on the floor till it's over. I remember now, once, down to——"

"Never mind that. Let us get on."

"I'm a peaceful man," he continued, repeating himself as usual; "yet if I had come across the Colonel after he stole my money, I'd have shot him—yes, if I hanged for it. Seems now as if I don't care much about it any more. I never had any money before I found that roll of notes in the empty cabin, and I'm no worse off than I was then. P'raps I shall go back to Oregon, and live in the cabin again by myself when I've seen the little maid. It's quiet living all by myself. When you go about in gangs there's no such thing as getting an hour's quiet; and a peaceful man loves to be quiet. Lord! if you'd heard the language I had to hear every day, you'd like a few years' quiet. No: I don't care so much about the money, and of course the Colonel has lost it all by this time."

"You want to see your daughter. I will help you, but on conditions. First, I must tell you that I am going to marry her."

"You are going to marry my little maid!" He stared in great amazement. "Why, she can't——"

"I am sure," said George, "that she has not remained a baby in arms for nineteen years. Yes: I am going to marry her. And it seems to me that the sooner I do it the better."

"Well, sir, it's real friendly of you, and I hope she'll make a good wife, and that you'll treat her kindly. But I do assure you, sir, that it is not my wish nor my intention to disgrace my daughter by staying at home. No, sir; a clerk I was once, with three pound a week, and therefore a gentleman. But I've had that knocked out of me long ago; and now I'm only a common loafer and tramp, except when I'm on my clearin' in Oregon, and the whisky-bottle's most always too much for me. She shan't blush for her father, sir—not after the first go-off, after I've had to own up. Tell me, sir, does she think much about the Fortune? Does she want money sent home to her to keep up her position, like her poor mother?"

"No, she does not. She believes—or did believe until the other day—that you are dead, and your Fortune all lost, or fallen into wrong hands. The loss of what she did not expect will certainly

not grieve her much—not half so much as to learn that her father, of whom she has learnt to think so tenderly, is a man who—finds a whisky-bottle most always too much for him."

The man hung his head like a schoolboy receiving reproof.

"Yes," he said; "I mustn't stay at home—that's a fact. Can't I go over this morning and have it out with her, and go away again?"

"No," George replied with energy, "you cannot. It is one of the conditions I make with you. You are to stay here quietly, for a week if necessary; you must not go out unless I go with you. You must not make any attempt at all to speak with her. Do you promise?"

The man hesitated.

"If you will not," said George, "I will make you put on again those disgraceful clothes; I will give you a bottle of whisky, and turn you into the road; you can then drink yourself blind drunk, and stagger off to find your daughter, and make her have you marched off to the station as a drunken vagabond."

The man shuddered and trembled.

"I will do," he replied, "whatever you tell me."

"Very well, then. Stay at home—here—until I come back. You may smoke a pipe all day long if you like, but there is no drink. Do you promise?"

"Yes, sir; I will do what you order. I wouldn't shame the little maid."

"Very good. But just tell me what you did it for. What was the good of deceiving her about your success?"

"Well, now"—he had grafted a kind of American drawl upon a full and rich Cockney twang, the result of which gave a peculiar flavour to his speech—"well, now," he said slowly, "put it to yourself. Here's a child at home taught to believe her father a lazy and idle fellow, with no smartness. Her mother taught her that, likely. Here's a father a good many miles away, who wants that child to stick out her chin like girls who have pride in their parents, as some do, not only in Stamford Hill, but also Tottenham, and many other places. Nothin' makes a girl so proud and haughty, and therefore happy, as being sure she's got a great and noble father. I remember them in church on a Sunday morning, their father being perhaps an alderman, and perhaps a common council man. What does that father do? Twice a year he borrows a sheet of paper, and on the Sabbath, when the rest are asleep or playin' monty, he sits and writes to that daughter letters which shall make her proud and happy. Do you call that, sir, doin' of a parent's duty, or do you not?"

George did a very unusual thing that morning; he asked for a week's holiday, and was granted it.

He began his week by a very busy and important morning. First, he had a long conference with Mr. Richard Ambler, in which

many things of interest were considered and action resolved upon.

"Remember," said the solicitor, "you have to protect Milly against the real man as well as against the pretender. And suppose the real man wants to sell her houses and pocket the money?"

"He will not," said George.

"I do not know. Perhaps he will not be tempted. As for Reginald, leave him to me. Professor of Astronomy, indeed! But what is the use of fooling poor Reginald? And to think that not one of us suspected the fellow! Now go, and lose no time. We have the rogue safe enough, but I do not know yet if we can proceed against him criminally."

"At all events, he stole the notes."

"Yes, yes, but it was in Oregon, and perhaps they might ask to whom these notes belonged: on the whole, it is a tangled business. He has attempted to defraud in instructing me to sell the property, but in doing this he injures not me nor his daughter, but the rightful owner, who is this man Montoro himself; and from your account I should say he would not be a likely man to become a prosecutor or give good evidence."

"The limpest weed of a man you ever saw," said George.

In the evening George came home. His prisoner had been asleep most of the day, and had obediently kept within the house.

"Very good," said George; "I will now reward you."

He took him out, and walked in the direction of Veritas Villa. At this time, in these summer evenings, the Discoverer's family were generally in the garden playing lawn-tennis. This evening they were all on the lawn together, Milly with them, playing. There was only a low wooden paling, over which one could easily look without the appearance of curiosity or impertinence.

"There," said George, "is your daughter. Not the little girl with the glasses; she is only fifteen, and Mr. Ambler's daughter. The taller girl. Look at her well. In a day or two you shall speak to her."

The man looked his best. When George, a few minutes later, drew him away, the tears were running down his face.

"I see," said George, "that your story is true. You are really Milly's father. But I was certain of it from the beginning."

VII.

TILL TO-MORROW.

THE next morning George greatly astonished the inhabitants of Veritas Villa by paying them a visit in the morning—a thing never known before. He explained that, as he had a holiday, he thought he would just look round and see them. His cousin Reginald was in the map-room? He would go there.

He found the Discoverer, aided by Copernica, spectacles on nose, busily engaged in cataloguing books, looking through letters, rolling up maps, and between these labours making notes for that great inaugural lecture which was to revolutionize astronomical research, in America first, and the Old World next. It was already a voluminous mass of notes—the Philosopher belonging to the school which thinks that the longer they make their utterances the more likely they are to be listened to. In the same way the scholars of the Renaissance used to believe that the bigger their books the more certain would be their immortality. And there are not wanting poets of this very century who also believe that the more they write the better they will be loved and preserved, and their memory kept green. As for novelists, they do not count, because nobody ever supposes that a picture of life can be thought worthy of preservation—lucky those who get read by their own generation.

"Come in, come in, George!" cried Reginald cheerily. "Here we are, hard at work—hard at work. I expect we shall have to sail in a week or two—as soon, that is, as we can sell off our sticks and get rid of the house. I am writing my inaugural lecture. This, George," he added with great seriousness, "is the most important piece of work, I am convinced, that I have ever yet been called upon to do. In it I have to strike a note, such a note as shall be at once an alarm and a message of Truth, and an echo"—he did not explain how an alarm could be all these—"yes, and shall re-echo through the length and breadth of the land, from the North Pole to the—to the mysterious ice-caverns of the Outer Rim. A college class, George, is a very serious thing, it is a sacred thing. I may regard my own as a collection of empty vessels waiting to be filled, or as so many canals which have to irrigate a thirsty country, or as so many springs of Truth. Ought we not, myself and Copernica, who shall be my assistant lecturer, to consider ourselves as instruments appointed for the spreading of Truth, or even prophets?"

Copernica blushed and gasped, and adjusted her glasses.

"Ought we not, I say——"

"You certainly ought," George replied, rudely interrupting. "But, Reginald—I will not stop your work many minutes—are you quite sure that it is wise to build upon this offer, to jump at the conclusion that you ought to accept it, to be so certain of going?"

"Why, George," the Discoverer smiled, "as regards the wisdom of the step, I may be allowed to be the best judge; as regards the certainty of going, I have already accepted the offer."

"Yes, yes; but, Reginald, are you quite sure"—here George looked confused—"that it is a genuine offer?"

"Genuine offer! What do you mean, George? The offer is made by Mr. Montoro himself—by Milly's own father. Surely I can trust Milly's father?"

"Yes, I believe you can trust Milly's father."

George could not help saying this.

"When he offers me such a post, what can I do but accept with gratitude?"

"Why," George replied, "it is ungracious to look a gift-horse in the mouth; but I think, if I were you, I would first find out where the college is."

"It is in Nevada, near the city of Colorado. I know where it is."

"In Nevada. Yes, yes. That is a long way off. Would it not be prudent first to get the prospectus, papers, calendar, or whatever the college has got to prove its existence?"

"Now, George." Mr. Ambler was really annoyed at this appearance of distrust. "In Milly's father's hands I am quite safe. 'He is bound to us,' he kindly says, 'by bonds of gratitude;' though Heaven knows Milly has done ten times as much for us as we have done for her. It is all quite settled. I have told Cousin Dick to have my funds sold out, and placed to my credit in the bank. When we get out, Mr. Montoro is going to invest the money for us at ten or twelve per cent. Think of that, after a beggarly three! Milly is going with us." George started. He had not quite realized what this meant. "Going too. We shall be quite a family party. George! What are you swearing for? and what are you banging the table for?" Because George suddenly remembered that he had only the night before agreed to entrust Milly to this villain's care for two years.

"George," said Copernica, frightened, "don't look like that. What is the matter? Because Milly is to go away for two years? Oh, for shame!"

He made a desperate effort, and controlled himself.

"I want you seriously, Reginald," he said, speaking calmly, "to consider the possibility of your not going at all."

"I cannot."

"Oh, George," said Copernica, "when he has got the chance at last of spreading the Truth all over the world."

"He can spread the Truth just as well—better even—from Veritas Villa," replied George cruelly. "Reginald," he repeated, "you must renounce this project."

"What! and give up my professorship?"

"Why, George?" asked Copernica. "Why is he to renounce the project?"

"Because—because there is a very good reason, but I cannot tell you to-day."

"If there is a good reason," Copernica insisted, "all the more reason for telling it at once."

"No. But think, Reginald, what would the place be to you, even if it were all that has been represented to you? An obscure college, in a new, far-off American town, a place where your voice would not reach beyond the walls of the lecture-room with its half-dozen

students. Call that an opening? Why, here in London you address the whole world. Everybody looks to London. Things said and written in London go over the whole world. You are at the head of a society, growing"—here he stammered, but held on bravely—"growing daily and rapidly in importance. You know that they are afraid of you at the universities. If you were in America you would be out of their way; they would fear you no longer. They ask for nothing better than your removal. Mr. Montoro is playing into their hands. As for your society, it would fall to pieces, and your theories would be set aside, and speedily forgotten, while you were eating out your heart in obscurity. It would be exactly as if you had never lived, while, after your death, some one would take up your ideas and steal them, and bring them over here and pretend that they were his own. But here you live like a king—like a king," he repeatedly mendaciously. "You control the scientific world, you keep your trembling opponents in perpetual terror; they are obliged to have recourse to every kind of disreputable dodge which you defeat; they try to close one avenue, you open another. This incessant activity frightens them; it confounds them; they never know on what side they are next to be attacked. Consider this, my dear Reginald."

"George," murmured the girl, "you don't mean it. You have never talked like this before. If only you meant it, you would be a Recruit, and the best we have ever had."

"I mean every word," he replied, though he felt that his name ought to have been written Ananias—"every word I have said. And as for you, Copernica, instead of crying out upon me for being unkind, you ought to be backing your father up, and making him feel that his right place is where he is sitting, in his wooden chair in the map-room at Veritas Villa, ready to fight with all comers."

"But what does it mean?" asked Reginald blankly. "Tell us only what you mean."

"I cannot to-day. But I will tell you to-morrow morning. Meantime, for Heaven's sake cease to build your hopes upon this project!"

"As for the honour of Mr. Montoro——" Reginald began, but stopped short, because, to his amazement, George began to clench his fist, grind his teeth, jump about the room, and show all the external signs of a wrath which can be only appeased and satisfied by the kickings, whackings, and free fights of the good old times.

Some day—we may not live to see it—we shall return to that excellent method of our ancestors. There are many men with whom one would like to have it out "en champ clos." I should, myself, enormously enjoy contemplating my enemy after I had taken the conceit out of him with a battle-axe.

This entanglement with Reginald Ambler was difficult to understand. What did the man want? To get them all out in America away from their friends, and to rob them? It must be that. Or

was it possibly pure devilry and wanton mischief? Not the latter, certainly. The Colonel was not at all the man to perpetrate such a gigantic hoax. One may imagine Theodore Hook doing such a thing if he had got the chance and it occurred to him; and how he would have made a song about it, and how they would all have laughed over their punch in the delicate and feeling manner of their time at the fine situation of the broken-hearted enthusiast. But not the Colonel; he did not desire to laugh—had not laughed, in fact, for something like twenty years, that is to say, ever since he began to live on his wits. Those savages of Ceylon, who never laugh, and only begin to smile when they are defunct and ghosts, live on their wits, which accounts for their melancholy. What the Colonel was contriving was pure rascality and robbery. In order to set up his gaming-saloon in the best style he wanted as much money to begin with as he could command. And he saw his way to getting a good large haul out of Reginald Ambler. However, George said no more, but left them abruptly. Then Copernica burst into tears, and threw herself into her father's arms.

"Oh, papa dear, what is it? what does he mean?"

"I do not know, child. How should I know? Is George gone mad?"

No: she shook her head. George was certainly not gone mad.

"There is something behind," she cried; "George does not talk at random. Oh! what is it?"

"I would stake my life," said her father shortly, "on Mr. Montoro's honour. Why—is George silly? Here comes home a man who has been so busy for twenty years making a great Fortune that he has never even had time to come home before—he is changed, of course. No one expected in a rich millionnaire the manner of a clerk, which he was before he went out. Everybody says he was once a very meek and humble creature. He isn't now. But so rich and successful a man can afford to be a little overbearing. He comes home, then——"

"Father," said Copernica desperately, "we may go on talking till to-morrow morning, when George is to tell us what he means. Talk as much as we like, we shall get no further forward. Shall we try and make believe that the whole thing is a dream, and that we shall not go out at all, so that we shall feel the blow less?"

"I can't, my dear," her father replied. "I think I must go out to America or somewhere else and have my say, or choke. Here no one will listen to me."

"They wouldn't listen to Galileo."

"I wish they never had. But as for me, I must speak. And this is my only chance."

"To-morrow morning—let us wait till to-morrow morning. At any rate, papa dear, if the worst were to happen—that is to say, if we could not go—we should be exactly the same as we were before Mr. Montoro came. But, oh, it is impossible!"

"It is impossible," said her father, trying to feel the confidence of his words; "George has got a bee in his bonnet. Many chemists get bees in their bonnets. Let us go on with our work, Copernica. Let us lose no time. The college must find us prepared."

But his hand shook, and his brain was troubled.

For there was a thing which he had not told.

On the morning before, Mr. Montoro had held with him a last conference on the subject of the college and the chair; he gave him a paper of instructions how to get to Colorado, showing what would be the cost of the journey, the time taken, and the best way there. It was a paper calculated to carry conviction to the mind of the most suspicious, even a Yankee lawyer. In fact, there is nothing which one man cannot persuade another to believe if he gets him quiet and away from his fellow-creatures. In the smoking-room of a club, for instance, nobody believes anybody. In the retirement of the Discoverer's map-room, the Colonel's lies, ingeniously constructed, were accepted without the least suspicion.

"And now, my dear friend," said Mr. Montoro finally, "I think we have settled everything. I cannot tell you with what satisfaction I look upon the fact that we have secured you for our new college. The possession of genius in our Professorial Chairs is, above all, the great thing wanted for a new Institution. Oh yes, to be sure, I had almost forgotten. About your own money matters. Have you arranged them?"

"I have written to my cousin, who manages my affairs, to sell out my stock and pay the amount to my account in the bank."

"Yes; that is well. We can get you better interest across the water. How are you going to bring it with you?"

"I do not quite know," replied the Philosopher, who had thought of tying it up in gold, and so bringing it in his pocket.

"Let me advise you," said Mr. Montoro. "If you are sure you can quite trust me—actually trust me—I will pay it into my own account, giving you a note or receipt for it, which will make you quite safe. You can give me a cheque payable to bearer, and I will save you all further trouble about it."

This was a perfectly faithful promise. He fully intended to save Mr. Ambler and his family all trouble about the money for the future.

He then sat down and calculated the cost of the journey, with a margin; he was very particular about the margin, so as to allow ample room, he said, for possible emergencies. This done, he subtracted the total amount from the sum lying to Mr. Ambler's credit.

"There," he said pleasantly, "it is a real comfort for me to be of a little assistance as a practical man to a Genius and a Philosopher. Draw me the cheque, payable to bearer—so. When did you order the sale of the stock? Yes, I do not think the money will be paid to your credit till the day after to-morrow. Then I should

think—but that matters nothing to you. So sign the cheque—Reginald Ambler. Shake hands, my dear friend. I believe firmly that you will always consider this as the very luckiest day in all your life. Courage! The way of glory lies plain and clear before you. Of glory? Ay, and of wealth and success to your boys. For I shall take care of them all. Yes, I charge myself with them."

It was the memory of this cheque and what it might mean, because the poor man knew nothing about stopping cheques, that lay on the Discoverer's conscience as heavy as lead.

George sought Milly, who was, if one may confess a thing which should not be a cause of shame, in the kitchen making gooseberry jam. This is a conserve favourably regarded by the youthful palate, and is cheap. To the adult who is picksome, the jelly of Siberian crab, which is soft and silky to the palate—as they say of claret and of tea—is preferable, and so is the preserve made of blackberries, which is full-flavoured and fragrant, yet fresh from the wood.

"Milly, my dear," he said cheerfully, though he was oppressed with the thing he had to face, "you look delightful in a white apron, and your fingers are so sticky that you are defenceless."

"George," she said demurely, "did you stay away from business on purpose to kiss me?"

"Not quite, dear child. On the contrary, I have a great deal to say to you. First of all, I have made my cousin Reginald miserable, and Copernica as well."

"Oh! But why?"

"Next, I am going to make you, not miserable, but full of wonder. My dear Milly, a very strange and most unexpected thing has happened. I do not think I ought to tell you to-day what that is. Indeed, you must not hint or let fall the slightest suspicion that anything at all has happened."

"Has it anything to do, George, with—with—with my father?"

"A good deal, Milly. But ask me no more."

"Yes, tell me: is it anything against him? I told you, George, that I do not love him as I ought to love my father, but——"

"But his honour is a sacred thing, Milly. There is nothing against your father's honour that I know of. Yet, remember that Mr. Montoro does not know that, and must not be told, or allowed for a moment to suspect, until to-morrow."

"It looks like conspiring against one's own father; but I do not expect that he will come here to-day."

"It is not that, Milly, as you will see to-morrow. It is conspiring for him."

"George, I do not understand in the least. To-morrow! Why, he is coming here to-morrow, to meet Mr. Richard about the sale of the houses. Oh, my poor houses! I am so sorry they are to be sold."

"I don't think they will be sold," said George.

"And to-morrow I am to drive about London to buy fine things for my outfit."

"Perhaps you will not take that drive," said George mysteriously.

"And I had a letter to-day from my aunt Paulina. She has not seen me for four years, but I told her, when I wrote last, that my father had returned, and she is coming here to-morrow to see him. 'Congratulate him,' she says, 'on his splendid success, and we shall always be pleased to see him, and you with him, at Wimbledon.'"

George laughed.

"I am glad your aunt is coming. It will be another agreeable surprise for your father. Does he know?"

"No, he does not. I only got the letter this morning. He has always declared that he does not desire to see any of his relations."

"Shall you send him the letter?"

"Why," said Milly, "my father has never even told me where he is staying."

"I can tell you that, if you want to know. Stay—I will tell you to-morrow."

"George, you are most mysterious. Tell me, is this a bad thing that has——"

"No, not a bad thing. It is such a good thing, Milly, that had it not happened"—his face darkened—"I would have wished you lying dead and buried in the graveyard, and myself beside you. Oh, my dear," again he clenched his fist, and looked like one who thirsts for another man's blood, "it is such a good thing that we shall have to go in humble gratitude for it all the rest of our lives."

"And I shall learn it to-morrow? Why, George, what can it be? It is not money—nothing to do with money would make you wish me dead. And you say that it does not affect my father's honour. Why, what can it be?"

"You shall learn it to-morrow. But for to-day, Milly, can you trust me?"

"Why, George dear," she said, throwing her arm round his neck—it was not true that her fingers were sticky—"George, if I cannot trust you, whom am I to trust?"

"Then, my darling, obey me for exactly four-and-twenty hours, and I will obey you for all my life to come. Listen, my dear."

He whispered.

The effect of that whisper could not be equalled even by the gallery in St. Paul's Cathedral. Milly blushed, and then turned pale; first, her eyes looked startled and frightened; next, they became soft; first she opened her mouth and gasped; then her lips trembled, and gradually settled into a smile.

"George," she said, "do you mean this?"

For reply he drew out a document and showed it to her. She read it through and blushed again. It was a formal document, the nature of which became evident to her after the first few words of preamble.

"But I sail the day after to-morrow."

"Do you think, my dear, that I am going to let you go?"

"But what am I to say? Oh, George, what will my father say?"

"He will approve—he will consent; and yet you will not go to America with him."

"Oh, I am in a dream!"

"Do you consent, then, my dear?"

She gave him both her hands.

"Yes, George; only tell me what to do."

"You have only to come to my rooms to-morrow morning at ten. Bring Copernica—poor little maid!—with you, and say nothing—not one word—to anyone, my dear. I cannot rest for thinking that you are not yet under my protection. Only one day more to wait. You cannot be carried off in one day."

"Who is to carry me off, George?"

"There is only one man, my dear, who would try, but he is possessed of many devils. Kiss me, and trust me, and say nothing."

All that day there was a restraint at Veritas Villa, and an uneasy feeling that something or other was going to happen. Copernica went on with her task of cataloguing, but without heart; the Discoverer continued to sit before the notes of his inaugural lecture, but somehow his enthusiasm was, for the moment, quenched. He even fell into one of those fits of despondency which sometimes, but rarely, filled his mind with the blackness of despair, because at those times a mocking voice asked him how it was that he could never account for a lunar eclipse. What should he say, when his class asked him how, on his system, he could produce an eclipse of the moon?

"Father," said Copernica at length, "it is no use trying to work. George meant something—he never talks idly; but let us put the things away and go for a walk."

She took her father to the banks of the river, where they wandered in a mood of settled gloom. The child tried to raise her father's spirits by pointing out the many proofs of the earth's flatness which could be gathered from the prospect around them. In fact, anyone who contemplates the Wanstead Marshes long enough cannot fail of arriving at the conclusion that the earth is as flat as a pancake. But the Discoverer remained dejected. Was the cup to be dashed away from his lips at the very moment of fruition? Was he really to go on in the old half-hearted way, making a Recruit now and then, courting contempt, being held up to ridicule? And then—the recollection of that cheque lay at his heart. Yet if one could not trust Milly's father, in whom was trust to be placed?

To-morrow—to-morrow he was to know.

One person remained to be prepared; this was the unfortunate

Johnny. George took him in the afternoon to see his old haunts. They visited together the places which he had known in the old days: the cottage where he brought home his young wife, and was happy before the sister married into carriage company, and the baneful passion of envy was aroused; the church where he once held part of a pew; the tavern, where there had been a club, to which he went once a week, when there was a sing-song. Johnny—whom it is impossible to call Mr. Montoro—shed tears in thinking of that weekly sing-song. Then they took train—in the old days it was an omnibus—to the City, and gazed at the exterior of the house where he had once been a clerk. When the man's heart was thus softened with the past, George began to prepare him for the morrow.

"I have kept you a prisoner all this time," he said, "partly for your own sake. Tell me, what would happen if you had met the Colonel in America?"

"I should have shot him," he replied. "Oh yes! I know I should have shot him; I felt exactly like shooting him."

"If you were to meet him here in England, what would you do?"

"There would be a fight," he said courageously. "Yes, I think—I'm most sure there'd be a fight, because I'm bound to call him a thief, and the Colonel is not a man likely to stand that—you lay your last dollar he isn't. So there must be a fight, you see."

"It would be a poor sort of a fight," said George. "Well, suppose you heard that the Colonel was calling himself by your name——"

"What 'd he do that for?"

"Suppose he went to Mr. Ambler's house and said he was Mr. Montoro, and that Milly was his daughter, and sold her houses, and told her to go over to America with him?"

"With him! Go with him!" The man became pale, and trembled in all his limbs. "The little maid go with him!"

"That is exactly what he has done."

Then Johnny began to swear. Mild as he was, he had learned to swear after the manner of the American rough and rowdy. He swore at the Colonel so terribly, that George thought he would have some kind of fit. He swore so long, that George thought he would never finish.

"Come," he said at length; "if you hadn't already sworn enough for ten men, I would ask you to say it all over again for me. Now, I warn you, to-morrow you will meet that identical villain. What are you going to do?"

"Why," Johnny replied slowly, "he hasn't got the little maid, has he? 'Twould be very different if he had. And he hasn't got the money for them houses, has he? So, mister, I think as I'm a peaceful man, I shall kind o' let him go. The Colonel's a terrible man to fight. It's a great thing to be peaceful- kind o' gets a man on in the world."

"Yes," said George; "you are a beautiful example, are you not?"

"But," said Johnny, "about them notes. Yes, I am afraid there may be a fight."

Poor Milly! Her luck in fathers was very bad. George wondered which of the twain, on the whole, was the most undesirable. Difficult to honour either of them—and there is an old-world prejudice that it is better to be a sturdy rogue than a coward. If the Colonel was a rogue, he was sturdy. If Johnny was indifferent honest, he was a most dreadful coward.

VIII.

WHO GIVETH AWAY THIS WOMAN?

"I KNEW," said Copernica, when Milly asked her to put on her hat and go for a walk with her—"I knew that something would happen to-day, and I knew it would be something to do with you, because George was in it: and it will be something to do with Mr. Montoro, because papa is in it. Yes, Milly dear, I will be ready in a minute. As for poor papa, he has not slept a wink all night, but walked about groaning, and this morning he is sitting all of a heap-like among the boxes. And oh, good gracious, Milly! you've got on your white frock and white gloves! What in the world——"

"Come," said Milly, smiling: "you shall know in half an hour as much as I know myself. Why, dear, as to what it all means, I know no more than you. But something has happened—something which is to make us grateful all our days, George says, and to-day we shall learn what it is."

"But why white frock and white gloves?" Copernica persisted. "It is like a wedding."

"Yes, dear," Milly blushed; "it is terribly like a wedding, is it not?"

First, they went to George's lodgings. This was in itself a remarkable thing, because George should have been at his business. But he was not; he was standing at the garden-gate waiting for them. With him were two gentlemen—one of them Copernica's cousin, Mr. Richard; the other, a strange man—not a gentleman exactly, to judge by his look, which was downcast and shy, as if he was dressed in a suit of clothes too good for him; and really, when Copernica, who was sharp of observation, brought her eyes to bear upon that stranger's dress, she became conscious that he was dressed in George's clothes, which made her feel as if she was in a dream. She was certain of it—quite certain of it—she knew the pattern and recognised the cut. Who was this strange man who must needs borrow a suit of George's clothes? Had he turned up with nothing to wear? And when he lifted his head and looked round him, in a furtive, ashamed kind of way, the child's brain became suddenly

troubled, because he reminded her of somebody—she knew not, for the moment, who it could be. This more than ever made her feel like being in a dream.

This uncanny ghost-like feeling may be arrived at any day by walking about the streets of London at twilight, when you just catch a glimpse—no more—of the faces as they pass, and find your mind presently filled with odd fancies and vague, sorrowful suggestions. You have seen—you remember when they have passed you—faces which reminded you of dead friends. The procession of London faces is endless; as one grows older the streets become more and more filled with the faces of the dead; so that one thinks sometimes that this marching in procession beside the living may be one form of purgatory; and one trembles to think that if we were to grow very old indeed, the procession of faces in a crowded street would be wholly composed of dead men. To this girl, the face of the strange man suggested likeness to some one, a feeling of having seen it before somewhere; and it made her uncomfortable. George did not introduce him to them; took no notice of him; and merely nodded to him when he said that it was time to be moving.

They formed a little procession. George and Milly went first; Mr. Richard and Copernica came next; and the stranger followed behind, saying nothing, but hanging his head with every appearance of great dejection.

It was only a part of the general mystery and strangeness, and, therefore, it did not in the least surprise Copernica that they walked all the way to Hackney Church, and went up the steps, observing the same order.

But in the porch of that great square Saratoga, or travelling-trunk, which does duty for a parish church, George stopped and said:

"Milly dear, I thought you would like to be married in the same church as your father and mother."

"Aye," said the stranger in a low voice, "it was in this very same church, twenty-one years ago. And Matilda in pink."

Then Milly was going to be married. That was one of the things. But why? And where was her father? And George looking as serious as if he was going to a funeral. At weddings people ought to laugh and be happy, she thought, being as yet young and ignorant, and not thinking that from weddings spring most of the ills which do afflict humanity; such as a lean purse, a nagging tongue, household troubles, sick children, bad sons, disappointing daughters, distraction of peace, abolition of comfort, and many others. It is true that there is the chance of great blessings; such as—— But they are known to everybody, and at the outset we all expect them, and mean to have them, and shape our course accordingly. But what, Copernica wondered, what in the world did this mysterious person mean by saying, "Matilda in pink"? Who was Matilda?

Then they went into the church. There were already assembled the People, represented—as is the way with the People on state

occasions, because they are all busy outside, toiling and moiling—by their elected and trusted functionaries, the verger and the pew-opener. And a curate was in the vestry putting on his robes of office.

They walked up the aisle and stood before the altar, and presently the clergyman came out of the vestry, and took his place, book in hand, and began the service. The words echoed mockingly in the great empty church. Copernica would have cried had not at the very beginning the stranger dressed in George's clothes begun to snuffle and to shed tears, which made her ashamed of being in his company. Why should he cry? What business had he with the wedding at all? She would have liked to whisper her opinion of this conduct to her cousin Dick Ambler, but he looked as serious as George, and bore himself as if weeping strangers in other people's clothes belonged to every wedding, like the dreadful old skeleton which was always present at the feast, though it was good manners to take no manner of notice of it.

Another wonderful thing. When the clergyman asked, "Who giveth away this woman?" the stranger it was who officiously stepped forward and performed this duty which Cousin Dick should have done, and he did it, too, with a most indecent choke and gulp, murmuring irreverently, "You bet I do," which is not in the prayer-book. And then to the end of the service he never took his eyes from the bride, who regarded him not at all, and seemed not to know that he was present, being wholly occupied with the overwhelming fact that she was being swiftly converted into a wife. She had her heart's desire—not quite in the way she had expected, which was a way of festivity and good wishes, but she had her desire. Therefore she ought to have been happy. But, oh, what would her father say? And what about that promise to go with him for two years? Yet George assured her that her father would actually consent. Why, how could that be? But she was married, the ring was on her finger, and the words were said; yet she was afraid—a girl on such an occasion wants to have her spirits kept up by the gathering of her friends; no one likes to be married in an absolutely empty church; it was like some uncared-for creature to be married with no one to support her except Copernica, and even her own father not present.

When they went to the vestry to sign, the strange man came with them, and signed his name after the bride, but she did not read his signature.

Then the ceremony was complete, and Copernica fell into the bride's arms and kissed and hugged her.

"Oh, Milly, Milly," she said, "what does it mean? Are you to stay while we go away without you? And what will your father say, and what will he do? Will he take you away with him just the same?"

"What should he do?" interposed the stranger huskily. "It isn't

for the likes of him to carry sweet maids away to America. Don't you take on, miss. He never meant it. Not for one minute did he think of doing such a thing."

"Come, Milly dear," said George; "you have got to listen to a little story before you go home—I mean, before you go back to your old home. Your home is with me now, thank Heaven! You will come too, Copernica. It is a strange story, not very terrible, but it might have been."

So they all went back again. There was no wedding-breakfast prepared, no champagne or drinking of healths, or wishing of joy, or throwing of rice, or looking up of old shoes. Not at all. They went silently into George's room, and stood looking at each other, and especially at the stranger, whose face betokened the most painful shame and confusion.

"Now," Mr. Richard said to him, "you have got something to tell us and something to confess. Try to tell your story straight through if you can. You had better begin at once. Milly, sit down and listen. We will all sit down."

They did so, leaving the unfortunate man standing before them just like a culprit schoolboy.

"I s'pose I must begin somewheres," he said feebly.

When this man was a clerk in the City he used not to say "somewheres," but "somewhere." He had lost, among other things, the art of speaking correctly, and now spoke as his companions for so many years habitually spoke. It is terrifying to think that any one of us, under similar conditions, would probably experience the same losses, and come, in time, to speak like a Cockney coster or a Californian rough.

In spite of the respectable clothes he wore—Milly herself now perceived with wonder that they were borrowed plumes—the poor man had so dejected and hang-dog a look that one felt sorry for him. But by this time she quite understood that something more unexpected even than her own wedding was to happen, and now she connected this walking Mystery in George's tweeds with the unexpected, than which, as we know, nothing is more certain.

"When I went away," this mysterious person began slowly, and as if feeling for his facts, "I thought, being a fool and inexperienced, that if you wanted money all you had to do was to go to America, where you would be sure to find it. Everybody, I thought, got rich in the States. It was only the trouble of going there and pickin' up the dollars. Lord! what a fool I was! Don't none of you believe it. America's the biggest fraud out. If anybody gets rich, it's the Americans themselves. You've got to work there harder than at home. If there's any easy places they're grabbed by the natives. Look at me. I gave up three pound a week to go out and make a Fortune. Did I ever get that three pound a week again? Did I ever get another easy place? Don't you think it."

"Isn't this," asked Mr. Richard unfeelingly, "rather a roundabout way of beginning?"

Copernica looked from Milly to the speaker, and back again. Strange, he was like Milly!

"Thank you, sir," the man replied humbly. "I'm comin' round to what I want to say. Lemme go my own way, if you please. Though if you've a better way, tell me that way, and I will go that way."

"You shall go any way you please," said George, "if only you'll get to the end somehow."

"Thank you, sir," he replied; "you are the only man as has said a kind word to me for twenty years, and I'm bound to please that man if I can"—he kept looking at Milly furtively—"especially since he's husband of the little maid." Milly started. "Very well, then. Hard berths I got, not easy at all. Sometimes it would be porter's work at a store. Did I expect when I gave up a most gentlemanly desk to go rolling casks of treacle? Did I expect to load the steamboats with wood? Did I go out there to do odd chores around, a day's work here, and another there, with a spade and a hoe, or a crowbar and a hammer? I've been a navvy on a railway; I've dug graves for a cemetery: I've cut wood and stacked it. All the hard jobs I had to do, while the natives spread themselves out around the stoves and put up their feet. That's the way they reward a man who gives up three pound a week to go out to them; that's the kind of Fortune they let him make: that's the kind of friend America is—a dollar and a hef a day, and leave it if you don't like it: there's plenty of tramps on the road will take it; that's what I gave up my berth for: that's what Matilda"—Milly started—"my wife, Matilda, sent me out for—said I was bound to be ambitious. Told me I ought to soar."

"George," said Milly quickly, "who is this man?"

"Wait a moment, dear. Go on, if you can," he said to the speaker. "I suppose we shall get to something in time. Patience, Milly dear."

"I know who he is," said Copernica, nodding her head. "I am sure I know. He gave her away. Oh, I see now!"

"Well," he continued, "at first I thought this was only the beginning—kind of a rough, hearty, free and easy welcome to new-comers; presently I should get the hang of things, and then I should begin to make that Fortune. By this time I was as ambitious as Matilda could ha' wished, because I wanted badly to get back that three pound a week with store clothes and a stove-pipe hat. Then, I concluded she'd be the least mite anxious about me, and so I wrote her a letter. And just to make her mind easy and to prevent her from falling into one of her tempers, which she certainly would have done if she'd known I was just then rollin' molasses, tyin' up sugar, heavin' logs, and countin' candles, I just told her I was soarin' already to unexpected heights, and the dollars comin' in wonderful.

No country, I wrote, like America. She wrote back, by return post, that I was to send all the money home as fast as I made it. I said 'twas all wanted for the big business I was carrying on, and bounced the more because I saw she was ashamed of having thought me such a poor weak creature. The more I bounced, the more she was ashamed, and kept a-wantin' to come out, and bring the little maid with her."

"George," cried Milly again, "who is this man?" But George made no reply.

"I know who he is," repeated Copernica; "I am certain I know. 'Matilda was in pink.' Oh, I know!"

"When a man begins to lie, it seems kind of impossible to go back on himself; so I kept it up, and when Matilda died, I carried on the same tale with the little maid, who I can't believe to be grown up so tall and handsome, and married before my very eyes."

"George," cried Milly for the third time, and springing to her feet, "tell me, who is he?"

"My dear, he is your father—not the other man at all. This is your father."

"Yes, my dear," the man repeated humbly, "your father, and you are the little maid as I've written so many letters to, and told so many lies about the Glorious Fortune."

"I said I knew," Copernica murmured. "Her father; but I wonder who the other is. You can't have two fathers."

"My father!" A month before Milly would have jumped into his arms first, and remarked his hang-dog look and poverty-stricken appearance afterwards. But I suppose there is only a limited amount of what may be called the impulse of affection in the human heart. At all events, her own did not leap up at all, nor did she show any signs of joy, but held her husband's hand more tightly, looking at this colossal American failure, the man who had been twenty years wriggling at the lowest depths, and could never wriggle any higher, and she repeated with much more wonder than joy: "My father!"

"I am, indeed," he said. "I would have liked to come home in silks and satins and gold rings, but I never had any luck. I would have sent the little maid all the money she could wish if I'd had it. But I hadn't got any to send."

"George," cried Milly, "if this is my father, who is—the other?"

"The other, my dear, is a——what you shall presently learn."

"But—but I have kissed him, and I was going away with him."

"You were," replied Mr. Richard, who, to his honour be it said, had been witnessing the proceedings with more than professional interest, though the morning's work would certainly be charged in the bill. "If it had not been for this discovery you would have gone with him. Fortunately we are in time to save, not only you from this danger, but also your fortune from destruction."

"He must be a rogue and a cheat," Copernica said in a low voice.

"Then all he told us and all he promised us were lies. O—h! But I knew who this one was directly he began to speak. And this is what we were to learn this morning. And George knew it yesterday."

"My darling," said George, taking his wife's hand, "you understand now why I wanted to marry you at once. If it rains fathers they cannot harm you now or take you from me. As for this one, I think he will not try to harm you. He is very different from the other. To begin with, he quite understands"—George shook his left forefinger in the direction of the man as if he were a lecturer in a show and pronouncing a discourse upon a giant, a dwarf, or a monster—"he quite understands that, after the life he has led, the way he came home, the habits—the habits, I say"—the stranger groaned and nodded gloomily—"he has contracted, the companions he has been among, the very language he has learned, and—and—and everything, it can no longer be considered reasonable that you either owe him any obedience or that he has any claim upon your affection. Besides, he has practised a most cruel and heartless deception upon you." The returned Fortune-hunter shook his head in the deepest self-reproach. "The most he can ask of you will be your forgiveness. As for staying on here, that, of course, is out of the question——"

"Quite," said Johnny. "Oh, quite! I know it."

"He has been among rough and common people so long that he would feel unhappy in a respectable English house."

"That is so," said Johnny.

"He has got, he tells me, a very comfortable clearing out in the Western States somewhere, with a house upon it, and—and, I suppose, what is wanted to live comfortably."

"Don't forget there's a whisky-bottle," said Johnny, not boastfully, but as one who wishes to make a completely clean breast.

"You see," George went on, that one fact illustrating the manner and customs of the man, without need of further revelations, "he has a whisky-bottle."

"When you've got that," said Johnny, "you don't want anything else," again, not boastfully or ostentatiously, but meaning to deliver himself of his own sentiments, and show himself to his daughter, in one full confession, the man he really was.

"Oh, good gracious!" said Copernica; "nothing else!"

"So that," George continued, "he has agreed and promised me, in point of fact, to go away at once—this very day—and get back to his cabin and his clearing in Oregon, as fast as he can. I do not think he can get away much farther from us than Oregon, which is on the other side of the Rocky Mountains. And when he is really back again in his own clearing, we shall be very glad to hear from him—occasionally."

But Milly's heart softened.

"If you are really my father," she said, holding out both her

hands, "who used to write me such loving letters, you should have something more to say to me, now, but farewell?"

He took her hand, and then timidly bent and kissed her forehead.

"My pretty," he murmured, "I'm not fit to be your father. I doubt whether you ought to ha' let me kiss you. I'm only what your husband says I am. But I meant well. I did indeed. And they were a great comfort to me—them letters."

He said no more, but his eyes—those foolish, helpless, and wandering eyes—filled with tears and ran over. This natural emotion was sufficient excuse to his daughter for his shambling speech and ungrammatical expressions. When had the other man shown the least emotion?

"Milly," said Copernica in her quick way, "I suppose you'll come home with me, if it is only to break the news and help unpack the maps again. How my poor father will ever get over it, I don't know. Mother will be pleased, I think. She never greatly took to the plan, and I think she'll be pleased to stay. But there, mother, you see, doesn't much believe in my father's wonderful discoveries. As for the boys, they must just stay where they are—poor fellows! Well, I should be sorry to think that poor Tycho was going out to roll molasses tubs, and Kepler to load up a steamboat with wood. As to the people," she added vindictively, turning her glasses full on the people referred to, "who go abroad and come home again without the common decency of being rich"—the returned pauper blushed—"all I can say is that they're quite as bad as other people who come home and pretend to have colleges, and not half so pleasant, while they last. What," she snapped at him so fiercely that he jumped, "what did you go away at all for, then?"

IX.

HIS CHRISTIAN NAME.

The map-room of Veritas Villa was stripped of everything. The maps and charts were rolled up, the sections showing the Polar Sea and the confines of the great Outer Rim, the drawings, drawn from the Scriptural accounts, the pictures made up from travellers' accounts, the books, all of which were astronomical, were taken down and packed in black boxes, locked up, fastened with rope, the Professor's name on them in white—Professor Ambler, Passenger for Colorado, viâ New York. Only the notes for the inaugural lecture remained, because the Discoverer intended to touch up, beautify, and make perfect the inaugural lecture during the journey. The notes were therefore neatly stitched together and placed in a little portfolio made on purpose for them by Copernica, out of mill-board and white silk, the title being in crimson and gold, and the

sun, moon, and stars, which floated on the cover, being in blue. It was beautiful and soul-inspiring even to look at that white silk portfolio, and to feel what an Evangel of Astronomical Truth it contained, and how fortunate were the Americans of Colorado State in getting such a Discoverer to reveal such a discovery. He sat—the Philosopher—among the boxes. He should have been triumphant, because he was going to get what he had prayed for all his life; but there was a cloud upon his brow; he was anxious. George's warning words weighed upon him still.

His wife sat with him. To her this breaking up of the old home, where her children had been born, where they had all been so happy, so anxious, so full of love, fear, hope, joy, sorrow—all the things which go to make life a thing always felt, if not always enjoyed, made her profoundly dejected. To be sure, she could not believe that they were really going.

"Reginald," she said presently, and after a long silence, "is it real? Are we to have an income of a thousand a year?"

"You doubt still, my dear. To be sure, you have doubted always."

"Not your cleverness, Reginald; but I could not understand how you alone could be right, and all the wise men wrong. Forgive me, husband."

"It matters nothing," he replied grandly; "the faith of the whole world will strengthen your faith too."

"But George, my dear—what did George mean?"

"I don't know what he meant. What he said was silly. Why, he tried to make out that I should do better by staying here. Staying here, where I have had to undergo every kind of contempt! What does George think about that? It seems to him a light thing for a man to be held up as a laughing-stock. They have called me a madman, they won't answer my letters, they quote me as one of the enthusiasts who ought to be locked up, they whisper if I get into a train; and if I go to church——"

"You never do, dear."

"No; because when I do, I hear them whispering as I walk up the aisle: 'There is the madman, or the fool, or the ass, who teaches that the earth is flat.' Do you think that is pleasant for me to hear? And then the Society does not increase. Bagshott is very good; he talks about Truth prevailing; but Truth doesn't make a start. The office-boy says that no one has called for six months, and there have been no letters for three. The office might as well be shut. Bagshott says he will remain at home and circulate the journal, which I shall be able to fill once I get a hearing. Why, out there—oh, wife, I shall have a hearing at last!"

He sprang from his chair and walked about, swinging his arms and sending his coat-tails flying—a sure sign of the deepest emotion.

His wife threw her arms round his neck.

"My dear," she said, "it is sad to me that our home should be broken up. But what matters anything if only you get the recognition which is your due?"

"Ah," he continued, "we shall begin a new life with an honourable position, an official and recognised position which must command—I say, my dear, command; hitherto we have begged—the attention even of old-fashioned astronomers. Oh, wife, do you not think I have felt the ignominy of my life, which I thought was going to be so glorious? Fifty years old next birthday, and nearly thirty given to the great Discovery, and Error still taught in every school, though I have never ceased to lift up my voice. Here, what hope have I? But there!—oh, there! with young and generous hearts, unprejudiced, open to reason, what a future awaits me there!"

He stopped, clapped his hand to his eyes as one who is dazzled by the prospect, and sat down. His wife listened and sighed. She had never before, perhaps, so fully realized her husband's position and enthusiasm; she sighed because the thought would intrude itself that something safe in the City would have been worth all the glory that science can confer. This is the way with mothers who have a large family and a small income; they would at any moment actually sacrifice all the immortality about to be conferred by a grateful posterity on their husbands in return for a solid income; they think that there is nothing in the world like domestic ease, comfort, and a good house allowance; nothing like bringing up the boys and girls well, and giving them a good start in life. If that great man, their father, cannot do that, why, a thousand pities that glory and an income do not go together. Perhaps the reason why the children of great men do not often become themselves great is that the family income would not allow of the first elements of greatness being properly taught.

"The boys like the prospect," said their mother dubiously. "We could not go without them, but Tycho is getting on so well, and we have such good reports about Kepler."

"They will get on better under Mr. Montoro's patronage. Everybody gets on in America; the Americans welcome Englishmen; they give them their best things; they smooth the way for them to get on. Mr. Montoro says so, and he ought to know. Look at his example. My dear, I have always been a Republican, I believe. It will be a congenial atmosphere." He threw out his arms as if to breathe the stimulating and bracing air of a Republic. "It is only only under such a government that Prejudice vanishes and Truth can win her way. You will see very clearly that in astronomy the great heart of the American people will soon beat true and sound."

Just then Copernica appeared. She was returned from the wedding. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes red, and the traces of tears lay upon her spectacles. She stole in like a guilty criminal,

and sank upon one of the boxes in a fine unstudied attitude of despair.

"Papa," she said, "we may begin to unpack our boxes at once." She jumped up and began to untie the cords with feverish haste. "Let us put back the maps and books, and go on as we used to. There will be no going to America."

"Copernica, are you mad?"

The Discoverer turned pale and trembled.

"I am not mad," she replied. "In a little while you will hear all. It is enough to make one mad, but I am in my senses."

At this moment the Benefactor himself appeared with a white rosebud in his button-hole, a white waistcoat, and brand-new hat and lavender gloves. No one could look richer than Mr. Montoro. Perhaps he overdid the part. Very rich men, if I may generalize from a limited field of observation, generally wear shabby hats and are careless about their gloves. But at Veritas Villa they were not close observers. At sight of him, so glossy, so well groomed, so prosperous and sleek, so confident and so brave, the Philosopher recovered heart.

But his wife caught Copernica by the hand and watched, her suspicions fully aroused.

"I shall not keep you long, Professor," he said, smiling. "All goes well with the preparations? The day after to-morrow, Milly and I shall be on salt water. Your cousin is coming here at twelve to complete the sale of my little property. He told you?"

"Yes, yes," the Professor wiped his brow—all would be well, surely. "Yes, Dick said I was to be in the way. To be sure, I am always at home."

"It is a bore," said Mr. Montoro, "that one cannot take a house and sell it as one sells a horse. The affair has been dragging for three weeks, and every week means loss when one's concerns are so vast as mine. Money, my friend, even the richest of us cannot afford to lose, and yet I believe I have lost more by the delay than if I had given the houses away. Milly will come with me, after we have finished, to complete her outfit in Regent Street."

"Why," said the Professor, "this little girl of mine came running in five minutes ago, crying that we should not go to America at all."

"No more we shan't,' said Copernica doggedly and idiomatically.

Mr. Montoro's eyes flashed.

"What does the girl mean?" he asked.

"We shall not go to America," she repeated.

Mr. Montoro hesitated. What did she mean? It puzzled him. At this moment he had not the slightest fear or suspicion of danger, yet the girl's words troubled him. What did she mean? In his pocket was the cheque for the whole of his victim's fortune. In a few moments he was to receive the produce of the sale of his houses which were not his to sell. In another day he was to start for

America, taking with him the girl whom he proposed to employ as a confederate and a decoy.

The moralist may pause to remark that the whole of this villainous scheme had grown up bit by bit from the robbery of the notes and the letters. Thus does one ill weed produce another, till the whole garden is overrun.

"Of course you will please yourselves about coming out. But I thought you had accepted my offer, Mr. Ambler."

The coldness of his tone frightened the Astronomer.

"Of course I have accepted," he hastened to make submission; "of course I have accepted. Why, the child is mad! I do not know what has possessed her this morning. Don't be offended, Mr. Montoro."

"And yet we shall not go," repeated this amazing girl.

Just then, at the stroke of twelve, Mr. Richard Ambler arrived, bearing his bundle of papers. With him were Milly and George.

It was remarked by Mrs. Ambler that Milly bestowed no greeting upon her father. She, too, exhibited outward and visible signs that something had happened. Her father, however, seemed to observe nothing.

"Now," he said, "let us finish the business."

"Your business," replied the solicitor, "shall be settled in a very few moments."

He stood at the table, the papers in his hand, at the right of the Discoverer, who sat in his wooden chair, looking on with troubled eyes, because things were going on which he understood not. On his left stood Mr. Montoro. Behind the solicitor was Milly, George standing beside her, and in the window Copernica and her mother. Then there was a hush while Mr. Richard read over his papers.

"I must trouble you, Mr.—ah!—Mr. Montoro," he said, "with a little business first. I have received your rents for a good many years. I have here a complete statement, with vouchers of receipts and disbursements for years."

"I don't want to see it," Mr. Montoro replied. "I really have not the time to look into these trifles."

"A hundred and eighty pounds a year, or thereabouts," said Mr. Richard, "is not a trifle. But if you will not examine the account, you will not perhaps object to give me a discharge in full of all claims. My cousin, as you know, has received the whole income, after paying ground-rents, repairs, and my own charges, for the maintenance and education of Miss Montoro."

"Let us sign this discharge and get on," said his client.

He took the paper offered him and wrote his name at the end of the form—"Charles Montoro."

"Thank you," said Mr. Richard. "Only, pardon me, in legal documents it is necessary to sign the name in full. Is this your only Christian name?"

The effect of these words was wonderful. For suddenly the

man remembered the rambling talk of Johnny in his cabin about his ridiculous Christian name. He had forgotten to find out what it was. He changed colour and glanced round him like a wild creature at bay. In the grave face of the solicitor, the angry looks of George Ambrose, and the cold eyes of Milly he saw that the game, somehow, was up.

"We will have both your Christian names, Mr.—ah!—Mr. Montoro."

"Both my names?" He seized the pen again. "Give me the paper back. I am to sign here, am I—and in full? Very good. Milly, my dear, were you ever told your father's ridiculous Christian name?" Milly made no reply. "Do you know it, Mr. Ambler? I think I would bet you five dollars that you do not know it."

"I do know it," said Mr. Richard. "The point is, that you do not."

Mr. Montoro threw down the pen and tore the paper across, with a remark about the Christian name which is generally expressed by a long black line.

"Tell me, if you please, what this means?"

"It means many things. But, first of all, is it not an unusual thing for a man to forget his Christian name? You may learn yours by looking at the register in Hackney Church, where you were christened and married. You are welcome to that information. Did you ever know a case in which a man forgot his Christian name?"

"This is a most extraordinary proceeding," said Mr. Montoro, recovering his coolness. "Is there anything more to follow? Milly, are you——" She turned her head and made no sign of hearing. "Is this a conspiracy, in which my own daughter is concerned? Are you in it too, you drivelling old idiot?" He looked so fierce as he addressed the Discoverer, that the latter jumped in his chair, and was seized with a mighty terror.

"We are all in it, except Mr. Ambler," said George.

"In that case," Mr. Montoro replied with dignity, "there is nothing for it but to set the law at work. You, sir," he addressed Mr. Richard, "will have to give an account of your management; part of the plot, I suppose, was to say nothing about it. Your share," he addressed George, "was the house property. Yours," he addressed Milly, "was to aid and abet your lover. An ungrateful and unnatural daughter!"

"Go on," said George; "my turn will come directly."

"I have nothing more to say," Mr. Montoro replied, taking his hat. "So far as I am concerned, this is the last time I shall speak with anybody in this room. The law shall take its course."

"By all means," said Mr. Richard. "First, however, George, you wished to tell the man what we know about him."

"I will tell Reginald in his presence," said George. He took up his position at the door, as if to bar escape. "This man, Reginald,

is not Charles Montoro at all—he is an impostor and a pretender—his real name is Percival Brooke West; he was once a gentleman, and in the army, but sold out many years ago, after the Crimean War; he then lived about town, gambling and throwing away his money. Fifteen years ago he got into a mess, and did something—I know not what—something disgraceful. Then he was obliged to fly, and was expelled his club. He went to America, and has lived on his wits, that is to say, by cheating and gambling in various forms. He met Milly's father in Oregon, robbed him of his money and his daughter's letters, and came to London. He now lives at the Langham Hotel under his own name. No, sir, you stay until I have finished. If you try to get out before we let you go, you will have to fight me."

The Claimant folded his arms, and tried to look unconcerned; but he failed, because he was totally unprepared for this. How on earth had they found it out? As regards the Christian name, that was an accident caused by his own carelessness; he ought to have foreseen this danger; it was a most foolish thing to forget. But the array of facts—how had they got hold of them? And he remembered, too late, what he had at the very outset proposed to himself, namely, to rush the thing through, and be off before any questions could arise. Better, far better, had he not been tempted by this dream of gambling in its higher branches, with a beautiful woman to help him. Better had he been contented with the plunder of Milly's houses, and made no attempt upon the poor Astronomer. But he had his cheque in his pocket that moment. When he got away he would drive straight to the bank: perhaps it would not be too late.

"You see," George concluded, "you are known."

"I see," he replied, "that you have conspired together to make up a story. Now, if you please, we will conclude this scene. But do not imagine that I am going to let you have my property."

"One moment. We shall not keep you much longer." George opened the door, and admitted the lawful owner of the name of Montoro. "You know this man, perhaps."

"Oh," said the Colonel, "you have got hold of Johnny, have you! That explains it. So you made your way home, Johnny, did you? Now I understand it all, and I suppose the game is up."

"Colonel," said Johnny, with a show of courage, "give me back my money and my letters."

"As for the letters," the Colonel took out his pocket-book, "here they are; I have no longer any use for them. As for the money, it was no more yours than mine. You have now got your cabin and your clearing. Be content with it, unless you prefer to stay at home with the most dutiful daughter in the world, and the most delightful son-in-law. They will be as charmed with your personal habits as you will be with the young man's manners. You were made for each other."

He tossed the letters across the table. Johnny seized them, and crammed them into his pockets.

"Can you tell me your Christian name before we break up this meeting?"

"They baptized me Worshipful Charles," said Johnny. "Colonel, don't keep all the money."

"Worshipful Charles!" the Colonel repeated. "Now, Mr. Richard Ambler, could anyone guess such a fool of a name as that? Worshipful Charles! It's enough to turn any man into such a Johnny as this poor creature. Milly, you will learn to love your new father more and more the longer you know him. He is as brave as he is truthful; he is as warlike as he is clear-sighted; he is as temperate as he is resolute; he hates whisky as he hates the sin of falsehood; and he is as rich as I am myself. As for the houses——"

"Matilda's houses," said Johnny; "they're the little maid's now—not mine at all. Colonel, don't be hard on a man. I'm a peaceful man; but don't keep all them notes."

"Peaceful! Good Lord!" cried George. "Is there a single kick in the whole man? He robs you of your money—he tries to rob you of your daughter—he has almost robbed her of her little fortune; and you call yourself a peaceful man."

"It pays best," Johnny replied; "I've got through life comfortably through being peaceful, with lots of fighting men, stickers and shooters, around all the time. Colonel, say you won't keep it all!"

"Good Heavens!" cried George again; "why, you ought to give him in charge. You should follow him to his hotel, and go with him wherever he goes, until he gives you back the money."

"That is what you would do, my fine fellow," said the Colonel. "I wish I had you out in the West; I would make you dance, my cocky little clerk with the bantam crow."

"And I, Mr. Brooke West, would make you hang."

"Hush! You don't know," said Johnny. "Oh, you don't guess what it is to fight a man like the Colonel. No, no—speak him fair. You will find him very good company, too," he added, without much fitness as far as anyone could tell. But doubtless in his mind there was some sort of connection.

"There are difficulties, Mr. Ambrose," the Colonel went on. He was quite easy and comfortable in his manner now, having made up his mind that it was quite useless to carry on the game any longer. "There are difficulties which you do not understand. Our gallant and daring friend Johnny, or Worshipful Charles, claims some money. He must first prove that he lost that money; next, that I took that money; and, thirdly, that it was his money."

"I found it," said Johnny.

"A very likely story. Now, is there anything more you wish to say, Mr. Ambrose, or any of you?"

At this point the Great Discoverer, who had been listening in an

abject state of confusion, bewilderment, and terror, began to realize something of the situation.

"George"—he pointed to the new-comer—"who, after all, is this gentleman?"

"This is Milly's father, Reginald. Do you not understand?"

"The place in his college has been offered to me. He knows that, I suppose?"

"Oh, papa," cried Copernica, "there is no college—there is no Fortune. This poor man is a beggar and a pauper; all that was said about the Fortune was false, wasn't it, you Mr. Montoro?"

He shook his head.

"All lies," he replied.

"Oh!" The Discoverer sprang from his chair and literally hurled himself upon the Colonel. He was not a fighting man, but his whole thought was not to let him go; therefore, he threw his arms round his neck and hung on. "Hold him—keep him from running away!" he screamed. "He has got a cheque for all my money—all my money—in his pocket—all my money!" He really shrieked in his agony, thinking that he had made his wife and children penniless.

"Let him go, Reginald," said his cousin; "let him go. Your money is safe." They dragged him, crying out for his money, from his enemy. "Your money is quite safe. You see, cousin, I naturally thought, when you sent me instructions to sell out, that you were up to some foolishness, so I took the liberty of delaying the business. Your stock, my poor cousin, still stands to your name, and your cheque is worthless."

"Richard," said Mrs. Ambler, who had been looking on with an earnest desire for all to go away, so that she could begin to make things as they used to be—"Richard, I shall be grateful to you for my whole life."

"In that case," said the Colonel, adjusting his rosebud, which had been slightly bruised in the struggle—"in that case, let us tear it up." He took it out of his pocket-book and did so. "And now, I am afraid there remains nothing but to unpack your boxes and put up your maps again. But you have my free permission to quote my case as that of a Recruit won over by force of reason and argument. If I can flatten the earth a little more for you in any part of it, I shall willingly do so. Nothing more, I think?"

"Richard," said Mrs. Ambler, "please make Reginald's money so that he can never touch any of it again."

"Except a criminal prosecution for conspiring to obtain money under false pretences," said Mr. Richard.

"Yes; that I fully expect. This witness"—he pointed to Johnny—"will be invaluable to you, will he not? Good-bye, Milly; I wish you, for your husband's sake, your mother's temper—good-bye!"

"Good Heavens!" said Mrs. Ambler; "we were within a day of being beggars! Oh, Copernica!"

He put on his hat and was about to go, when the door opened, and a lady of middle age, very stout, and extremely dignified in her bearing, dressed in gorgeous silks, appeared.

"Where," she said, looking round the room, "is my brother-in-law, Charles Montoro?"

"Your brother-in-law, madam?" asked the Colonel. "Is Worshipful Charles your brother-in-law? Do you mean the rich, the successful—the enormously rich and successful Worshipful Charles Montoro?"

"Certainly I do. Milly, my dear, is this gentleman your father? He does not look——"

"Behold him! Come, Johnny." The Colonel seized the man of peace, who had shown at sight of the new-comer a desire to hide himself behind Mr. Richard, and dragged him forward. "Your sister-in-law—perhaps Matilda's sister, who married into carriage-company."

"Oh, Lord! It is P'leena!" said Johnny, looking horribly guilty.

"My dear Aunt Paulina"—Milly stepped forward—"there has been a very great mistake. My father has not made the great Fortune we all thought he had. He has failed, and is very poor; in fact, he is going back to America, where he has a small farm. All our plans are changed; and I was married this morning to George Ambrose."

"No Fortune? No money made? You a pauper, Charles?" The lady grew very red. "Explain this deception, pray. Milly, I demand an explanation."

"It is P'leena!" Johnny repeated.

"There is none to make, aunt, except what I have told you—my father is not rich."

"I have driven all the way from Wimbledon to be confronted with a Pauper!" said this amiable lady: "after what I have been given to understand. And you, Milly, have actually married without consulting me, your only respectable relation! Pray, what is your husband?"

"I am a clerk," said George unblushingly.

"Henceforth, Milly," said the outraged lady, "go your own way. You have no more ambition than your father. A Pauper!" She withered the luckless Johnny. "It is enough to make my poor, deceived, unfortunate sister Matilda turn in the grave into which you have worried her. After all that has been done for you, Milly, you marry a clerk!"

She walked out, and the next moment they heard the wheels of her carriage driving her away.

"This is very amusing," said the Colonel. "I congratulate you, Johnny, on your reception by your friends. Nothing like the domestic affections, is there? Now I am going—my cab is outside. Would you like a lift to town, Johnny, just to talk about

those notes? We shall agree very well together, once we get away from mischievous pettifoggers and greedy clerks."

Johnny followed unresisting; he could not resist the Colonel. He did not even say good-bye to his daughter, but went without a word.

Milly expected her father to return that day, and the next, and the day after. Then George went to the Langham and inquired. Mr. Brooke West was gone, and nothing was known of any Mr. Montoro. What happened was very simple. The Colonel drove his friend Johnny to Wapping, or the neighbourhood. There he gave him dinner, with copious whisky. He then found out a steamer going to sail to New York the next day. He persuaded Johnny, without the least difficulty, that his only chance was to get back to Oregon with all speed, lest somebody should take possession of his clearing, and that ten pounds, as an advance, would quite cover any claims he might have on account of that bundle of notes. He nursed Johnny all that day, keeping him happy with whisky and amused with continual talk. In the morning he took him on board, and did not leave him until the last bell rang and the last visitor had to descend the companion. In fact, he was the last; and as he went down, Johnny was feebly hanging over the bulwarks, waving his hat in a friendly farewell. Never was such a Johnny known.

I believe that he is now sitting by himself in the shade beside his cabin, listening contentedly to the murmur of the stream, and regarding through the door with sentimental admiration a distant view of the whisky-bottle on the table.

As for the Astronomer, it took him many days to recover even the semblance of dignity and self-respect. He was crushed; he did not dare to face the boys, who were reduced to mere rags of despair and wrath. Copernica took her father to the seaside at Walton-on-Naze, where he amused himself by considering the flatness of the ocean, and so gradually pulled round. He has now entirely recovered, because he has made converts of two ladies—sisters—with money. They are convinced that he is not only right and a very great Discoverer indeed, but also that he is mentioned in Prophecy, and will be connected with the end of the world. They talk of leaving him all their money for the purpose of disseminating the truth. He has begun a new chapter on the Flatness of the Earth, and has promised a Speculation on the Outer Rim. Sometimes, however, the healed wound breaks out afresh, and he remembers with shame and sorrow how he was cajoled and deceived, and how he was ready to part with the whole of his fortune to an unscrupulous adventurer and cheat.

I ought to leave the Colonel to his own devices. In novels he would have gone back to America, there to lose all his ill-gotten money on euchre and a black bottle; after this he would have

become once more adventurer, sportsman, and card-sharper; and he would have been finally hanged for horse-stealing, or shot for cheating at monty. I beg to explain that Mr. Percival Brooke West did nothing of the kind.

Johnny despatched, he sat down to think.

First of all, he had not done so badly since he had managed to get into his little gambling circle. The stolen eight hundred pounds had increased to more than a thousand, without deducting his personal expenses. And he felt that he could not possibly return to the old life. And then he remembered that he had a mother and sisters.

They lived by the seaside in a pretty cottage—a widow-woman and two elderly daughters. They are quite well-to-do people, and until the autumn of this year of grace, eighteen hundred and eighty-three, they lamented continually the absence of the son and brother who had turned out so badly, and been so "extravagant"—that is how they put it; but though they knew nothing for certain, they were aware that there had been more than extravagance.

One morning in September the prodigal came home.

"Mother," he said, "let us have no talk of the past. I have had time to sow my wild oats. I have saved, at the expense of many privations and great resolution, a small sum of money to come home with. Let me stay a little while with you and my sisters before I go back to the struggle." He had grown his grey beard again, looked quite gentle and humble, and spoke so kindly that their hearts were melted.

Let him stay? Will they ever let him go? And if a tiger be well fed, regularly fed, and kept warm, and given all that he wants, that tiger, in course of time, will become, if you please, a mere tame cat. He will undergo this transformation without any repentance, tears, remorse, sorrow, self-reproach, penitence, or lamentations of a sinner, but comfortably, gradually, and smoothly. In course of time, Mr. Percival Brooke West will, I dare say, inherit his mother's property. He will not return to town, where his late reception inspired him with a dislike for Clubland; but will remain in the country, and will become an authority on whist; he will be popular among many as he grows older, on account of his strange experiences and his varied stories of travel and adventure: and though in course of time there may come into the country rumours of wild youth and excesses, followed by trouble, no one will believe that he was ever anything but an honourable gentleman, with as fair a record as falls to the lot of most, though perhaps he lost his money, and had to go abroad for a time to make more.

But Milly and her husband abide by the banks of the gentle river Lea, and are contented, and he hopes to do such great things in the future as will lead him to the gate of honour and the way of wealth.

IN LUCK AT LAST.

I.

WITHIN THREE WEEKS.

If everyone were allowed beforehand to choose and select for himself the most pleasant method of performing this earthly pilgrimage, there would be, I have always thought, an immediate run upon that way of getting to the Delectable Mountains which is known as the Craft and Mystery of Second-hand Bookselling. If, further, one were allowed to select and arrange the minor details—such, for instance, as the character of the shop, it would seem desirable that the kind of bookselling should be neither too lofty nor too mean—that is to say, that one's ambition would not aspire to a great collector's establishment, such as one or two we might name in Piccadilly, the Haymarket, or New Bond Street: these should be left to those who greatly dare and are prepared to play the games of Speculation and of Patience; nor, on the other hand, would one choose an open cart at the beginning of the Whitechapel Road, or a shop in Seven Dials, whose stock-in-trade would consist wholly of three or four boxes outside the door filled with odd volumes at twopence apiece. As for "pitch" or situation, one would wish it to be somewhat retired, but not too much; one would not, for instance, willingly be thrown away in Hoxton, nor would one languish in the obscurity of Kentish Town; a second-hand bookseller must not be so far removed from the haunts of men as to place him practically beyond the reach of the collector; nor, on the other hand, should he be planted in a busy thoroughfare—the noise of many vehicles, the hurry of quick footsteps, the swift current of anxious humanity, are out of harmony with the atmosphere of a second-hand bookshop. Some suggestion of external repose is absolutely necessary; there must be some stillness in the air; yet the thing itself belongs essentially to the city; no one can imagine a second-hand bookshop beside green fields—so that there should be some murmur and perceptible hum of mankind always present in the ear. Thus there are half-a-dozen

bookshops in King William Street, Strand, which seem to enjoy every possible advantage of position, for they are in the very heart of London, but yet are not exposed to the full noise and tumult of that overflowing tide which surges round Charing Cross. Again, there are streets north of Holborn and Oxford Street most pleasantly situated for the second-hand bookseller, and there are streets where he ought not to be, where he has no business, and where his presence jars. Could we, for instance, endure to see the shop of a second-hand bookseller established in Cheapside?

Perhaps, however, the most delightful spot in all London for a second-hand bookshop is that occupied by Emblem's in the King's Road, Chelsea.

It stands at the lower end of the road, where one begins to realize and thoroughly feel the influences of that ancient and lordly suburb. At this end of the road there are rows of houses with old-fashioned balconies; right and left of it there are streets which in the summer and early autumn are green, yellow, red, and golden with their masses of creepers; squares which look as if, with the people living in them, they must belong to the year eighteen hundred; neither a day before nor a day after; they lie open to the road, with their gardens full of trees. Cheyne Walk and the old church, with its red-brick tower, and the new Embankment, are all so close that they seem part and parcel of the King's Road. The great Hospital is within five minutes' walk, and sometimes the honest veterans themselves may be seen wandering in the road. The air is heavy with associations and memories. You can actually smell the fragrance of the new-made Chelsea buns, fresh from the oven, as they were baked just a hundred years ago. You may sit with dainty damsels, all hoops and furbelows, eating custards at the Bunhouse; you may wander among the rare plants of the Botanic Gardens. The old great houses rise, shadowy and magnificent, above the modern terraces; Don Saltero's Coffee-House yet opens its hospitable doors; Sir Thomas More meditates again on Cheyne Walk; at dead of night the ghosts of ancient minuet tunes may be heard from the Rotunda of Ranelagh Gardens, though the new barracks stand upon its site; and along the modern streets you may see the ladies with their hoop petticoats and the gentlemen with their wigs and their three-cornered hats and swords, and you are not in the least astonished.

Emblem's is one of two or three shops which stand together, but it differs from its neighbours in many important particulars. For it has no plate-glass, as the others have; nor does it stand like them with open doors; nor does it flare away gas at night; nor is it bright with gilding and fresh paint; nor does it seek to attract notice by posters and bills. On the contrary, it retains the old, small, and unpretending panes of glass which it has always had; in the evening it is dimly lighted, and it closes early; its door is always shut, and although the name over the shop is dingy, one

feels that a coat of paint, while it would certainly freshen up the place, would take something from its character. For a second-hand bookseller who respects himself must present an exterior which has something of faded splendour, of worn paint and shabbiness. Within the shop, books line the walls and cumber the floor. There are an outer and an inner shop; in the former a small table stands among the books, at which Mr. James, the assistant, is always at work cataloguing, when he is not tying up parcels; sometimes even with gum and paste repairing the slighter ravages of time—foxed bindings and close-cut margins no man can repair. In the latter, which is Mr. Emblem's sanctum, there are chairs and a table, also covered with books, a writing-desk, a small safe, and a glass case, wherein are secured the more costly books in stock. Emblem's, as must be confessed, is no longer quite what it was in former days; twenty, thirty, or forty years ago that glass case was filled with precious treasures. In those days, if a man wanted a book of county history, or of genealogy, or of heraldry, he knew where was his best chance of finding it, for Emblem's in its prime and heyday, had its speciality. Other books treating on more frivolous subjects, such as science, belles lettres, Art, or politics, Emblem's would consider, buy, and sell again; but it took little pride in them. Collectors of county histories, however, and genealogy-hunters and their kind, knew that at Emblem's, where they would be most likely to get what they wanted, they would have to pay its market price for it.

There is no patience like the patience of a book-collector; there is no such industry given to any work comparable with the thoughtful and anxious industry with which he peruses the latest catalogues; there is no care like unto that which rends his mind before the day of auction or while he is still trying to pick up a bargain; there are no eyes so sharp as those which pry into the contents of a box full of old books, tumbled together, at sixpence a piece. The bookseller himself partakes of the noble enthusiasm of the collector; he is himself a collector, though he sells his collection; like the amateur, the professional moves heaven and earth to get a bargain; like him, he rejoices as much over a book which has been picked up below its price, as over a lost sheep which has returned into the fold. But Emblem is now old, and Emblem's shop is no longer what it was to the collector of the last generation.

It was an afternoon in late September, and in this very year of grace, eighteen hundred and eighty-four. The day was as sunny and warm as any of the days of its predecessor Augustus the Gorgeous, but yet there was an autumnal feeling in the air which made itself felt even in the streets where there were no red and yellow Virginia creeper, no square gardens with long trails of mignonette and banks of flowering nasturtiums. In fact, you cannot anywhere escape the autumnal feeling which begins about the middle of September. It makes old people think with sadness that the

grasshopper is a burden in the land, and that the almond-tree is about to flourish; but the young it fills with a vinous and intoxicated rejoicing, as if the time of feasting, fruits, harvests, and young wine, strong and fruity, was upon the world. It made Mr. James—his surname has never been ascertained, but man and boy, Mr. James has been at Emblem's for twenty-five years and more—leave his table where he was preparing the forthcoming catalogue, and go to the open door, where he wasted a good minute and a half in gazing up at the clear sky and down the sunny street. Then he stretched his arms and returned to his work, impelled by the sense of duty rather than by the scourge of necessity, because there was no hurry about the catalogue and most of the books in it were rubbish, and at that season of the year few customers could be expected, and there were no parcels to tie up and send out. He went back to his work, therefore, but he left the door partly open in order to enjoy the sight of the warm sunshine. Now for Emblem's to have its door open, was much as if Mr. Emblem himself should so far forget his self respect as to sit in his shirt-sleeves. The shop had been rather dark, the window being full of books; but now through the open door there poured a little stream of sunshine, reflected from some far-off window. It fell upon a row of old eighteenth-century volumes, bound in dark and rusty leather, and did so light up and glorify the dingy bindings and faded gold, that they seemed fresh from the binder's hands, and just ready for the noble purchaser, long since dead and gone, whose book-plate they bore. Some of this golden stream fell also upon the head of the assistant—it was a red head with fiery red eyes, red eyebrows, bristly and thick, and sharp thin features to match—and it gave him the look of one who is dragged unwillingly into the sunlight. However, Mr. James took no notice of the sunshine, and went on with his cataloguing almost as if he liked that kind of work. There are many people who seem to like dull work, and they would not be a bit more unhappy if they were made to take the place of Sisyphus, or transformed into the damsels who are condemned to toil continually at the weary work of pouring water into a sieve. Perhaps Sisyphus does not so much mind the continual going up and down hill. "After all," he might say, "this is better than the lot of poor Ixion. At all events, I have got my limbs free." Ixion, on the other hand, no doubt, is full of pity for his poor friend Sisyphus. "I, at least," he says, "have no work to do. And the rapid motion of the wheel is in sultry weather breezy and pleasant."

Behind the shop, where had been originally the "back parlour," in the days when every genteel house in Chelsea had both its front and back parlour—the latter for sitting and living in, the former for the reception of company—sat this afternoon the proprietor, the man whose name had stood above the shop for fifty years, the original and only Emblem. He was—nay, he is—for you may still find him in his place, and may make his acquaintance over a county

history any day in the King's Road—he is an old man now, advanced in the seventies, who was born before the battle of Waterloo was fought, and can remember Chelsea when it was full of veterans wounded in battles fought long before the Corsican Attila was let loose upon the world. His face wears the peaceful and wise expression which belongs peculiarly to his profession. Other callings make a man look peaceful, but not all other callings make him look wise. Mr. Emblem was born by nature of a calm temperament—otherwise he would not have been happy in his business; a smile lies generally upon his lips, and his eyes are soft and benign; his hair is white, and his face, once ruddy, is pale, yet not shrunk and seamed with furrows, as happens to so many old men, but round and firm; like his chin and lips, it is clean shaven; he wears a black coat extraordinarily shiny in the sleeve, and a black silk stock, just as he used to wear in the thirties when he was young, and something of a dandy, and would show himself on a Saturday evening in the pit of Drury Lane; and the stock is fastened behind with a silver buckle. He is, in fact, a delightful old gentleman to look at, and pleasant to converse with, and on his brow everyone who can read may see, visibly stamped, the seal of a harmless and honest life. At the contemplation of such a man, one's opinion of humanity is sensibly raised, and even house agents, plumbers, and suburban builders, may feel when they gaze upon Mr. Emblem, that, after all, virtue may bring with it some reward.

The quiet and warmth of the afternoon, unbroken to his accustomed ear, as it would be to a stranger, by the murmurous roll of London, made him sleepy. In his hand he held a letter which he had been reading for the hundredth time, and of which he knew by heart every word; and as his eyes closed he went back in imagination to a passage in the past which it recalled.

He stood, in imagination, upon the deck of a sailing-ship—an emigrant ship. The year was eighteen hundred and sixty-four, a year when very few were tempted to try their fortunes in a country torn by civil war. With him were his daughter and his son-in-law, and they were come to bid the latter farewell.

"My dear—my dear," cried the wife, in her husband's arms, "come what may, I will join you in a year."

Her husband shook his head sadly.

"They do not want me here," he said; "the work goes into stronger and rougher hands. Perhaps over there we may get on better; and besides, it seems an opening."

If the kind of work which he wanted was given to stronger and rougher hands than his in England, far more would it be the case in young and rough America. It was journalistic work—writing work—that he wanted; and he was a gentleman, a scholar, and a creature of retired and refined tastes and manners. There are, perhaps, some still living who have survived the tempestuous life of the ordinary Fleet Street "newspaper man" of twenty or thirty

years ago: perhaps one or two among these remember Claude Aglen—but he was so short a time with them that it is not likely; those who do remember him will understand that the way to success, rough and thorny for all, for such as Aglen was impossible.

"But you will think every day of little Iris?" said his wife. "Oh, my dear, if I were only going with you! And but for me you would be at home with your father, well and happy."

Then in his dream, which was also a memory, the old man saw how the young husband kissed and comforted his wife.

"My dear," said Claude, "if it were not for you, what happiness could I have in the world? Courage, my wife! courage and hope. I shall think of you and of Iris all day and all night, until we meet again."

And so they parted, and the ship sailed away.

The old man opened his eyes and looked about him. It was a dream.

"It was twenty years ago," he said, "and Iris was a baby in arms. Twenty years ago, and he never saw his wife again. Never again! Because she died," he added, after a pause: "my Alice died!"

He shed no tears, being so old that the time of tears was well-nigh past—at seventy-five the eyes are drier than at forty, and one is no longer surprised or disappointed, and seldom even angry, whatever happens.

But he opened the letter in his hand and read it again mechanically. It was written on thin foreign paper, and the creases of the folds had become gaping rents. It was dated September, 1866, just eighteen years back.

"When you read these lines," the letter said, "I shall be in the silent land, whither Alice, my wife, has gone before me. It would be a strange thing only to think upon this journey which lies before me, and which I must take alone, had I time left for thinking. But I have not. I may last a week, or I may die in a few hours. Therefore, to the point.

"In one small thing we deceived you, Alice and I—my name is not Aglen at all: we took that name for certain reasons. Perhaps we were wrong, but we thought that as we were quite poor, and likely to remain poor, it would be well to keep our secret to ourselves. Forgive us both this suppression of the truth. We were made poor by our own voluntary act and deed, and because I married the only woman I loved.

"I was engaged to a girl whom I did not love. We had been brought up like brother and sister together, but I did not love her, though I was engaged to her. In breaking this engagement I angered my father. In marrying Alice I angered him still more.

"I now know that he has forgiven me; he forgave me on his death-bed: he revoked his former will, and made me his sole heir—just as if nothing had happened to destroy his old affection—subject to one condition—viz., that the girl to whom I was first

engaged should receive the whole income until I, or my heirs, should return to England in order to claim the inheritance.

"It is strange. I die in a wooden shanty, in a little western town, the editor of a miserable little country paper. I have not money enough even to bury me, and yet, if I were at home, I might be called a rich man, as men go. My little Iris will be an heiress. At the very moment when I learn that I am my father's heir, I am struck down by fever; and now I know that I shall never get up again.

"It is strange. Yet my father sent me his forgiveness, and my wife is dead, and the wealth that has come is useless to me. Wherefore, nothing now matters much to me, and I know that you will hold my last wishes sacred.

"I desire that Iris shall be educated as well and thoroughly as you can afford; keep her free from rough and rude companions; make her understand that her father was a gentleman of ancient family; this knowledge will, perhaps, help to give her self-respect. If any misfortune should fall upon you, such as the loss of health or wealth, give the papers enclosed to a trustworthy solicitor, and bid him act as is best in the interests of Iris. If, as I hope, all will go well with you, do not open the papers until my child's twenty-first birthday; do not let her know until then that she is going to be rich; on her twenty-first birthday open the papers and bid her claim her own.

"To the woman I wronged—I know not whether she has married or not—bid Iris carry my last message of sorrow at what has happened. I do not regret, and I have never regretted, that I married Alice. But I gave her pain, for which I have never ceased to grieve. I have been punished for this breach of faith. You will find among the papers an account of all the circumstances connected with this engagement. There is also in the packet my portrait, taken when I was a lad of sixteen; give her that as well; there is the certificate of my marriage, my register of baptism, that of Iris's baptism, my signet-ring——" "His arms"—the old man interrupted his reading—"his arms were quarterly: first and fourth, two roses and a boar's head, erect; second and third, gules and fesse between—between—but I cannot remember what it was between ——" He went on reading: "My father's last letter to me; Alice's letters, and one or two from yourself. If Iris should unhappily die before her twenty-first birthday, open these papers, find out from them the owner's name and address, seek her out, and tell her that she will never now be disturbed by any claimants to the estate."

The letter ended here abruptly, as if the writer had designed to add more, but was prevented by death.

For there was a postscript, in another hand, which stated: "Mr. Aglen died November 25th, 1866, and is buried in the cemetery of Johnson City, Ill."

The old man folded the letter carefully, and laid it on the table.

Then he rose and walked across the room to the safe, which stood with open door in the corner farthest from the fireplace. Among its contents was a packet sealed and tied up in red tape, endorsed: "For Iris. To be given to her on her twenty-first birthday. From her father."

"It will be her twenty-first birthday," he said, "in three weeks. Then I must give her the packet. So—so—with the portrait of her father, and his marriage-certificate." He fell into a fit of musing, with the papers in his hand. "She will be safe, whatever happens to me; and as to me, if I lose her—of course I shall lose her. Why, what will it matter? Have I not lost all, except Iris? One must not be selfish. Oh, Iris, what a surprise—what a surprise I have in store for you!"

He placed the letter he had been reading within the tape which fastened the bundle, so that it should form a part of the communication to be made on Iris's birthday.

"There," he said, "now I shall read this letter no more. I wonder how many times I have read it in the last eighteen years, and how often I have wondered what the child's fortune would be? In three weeks—in three short weeks. Oh, Iris, if you only knew!"

He put back the letters and the packet, locked the safe, and resumed his seat. The red-eyed assistant, still gumming and pasting his slips with punctilious regard to duty, had been following his master's movements with curiosity.

"Counting his investments again as usual," Mr. James murmured. "Ah, and adding 'em up! Always at it. Oh, what a trade it must have been once!"

Just then there appeared in the door a gentleman. He was quite shabby, and even ragged in his dress, but he was clearly a gentleman. He was no longer young; his shoulders were bent, and he had the unmistakable stamp and carriage of a student.

"Guv'nor's at home," said the assistant briefly.

The visitor walked into the sanctum. He had under his arm half a dozen volumes, which, without a word, he laid before Mr. Emblem, and untied the string.

"You ought to know this book," he said, without further introduction.

Mr. Emblem looked doubtfully at the visitor.

"You sold it to me twenty-five years ago," he went on, "for five pounds."

"I did. And I remember now. You are Mr. Frank Farrar. Why, it is twenty-five years ago!"

"I have bought no more books for twenty years and more," he replied.

"Sad—sad! Dear me—tut, tut!—bought no books? And you, Mr. Farrar, once my best customer. And now—you do not mean to say that you are going to sell—that you actually want to sell—this precious book?"

"I am selling, one by one, all my books," replied the other with a sigh. "I am going downhill, Emblem, fast."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" replied the bookseller. "This is very sad. One cannot bear to think of the libraries being dispersed and sold off. And now yours, Mr. Farrar? Really, yours? Must it be?"

"'Needs must,'" Mr. Farrar said with a sickly smile, "needs must when the devil drives. I have parted with half my books already. But I thought you might like to have this set, because they were once your own."

"So I should"—Mr. Emblem laid a loving hand upon the volumes—"so I should, Mr. Farrar, but not from you; not from you, sir. Why, you were almost my best customer—I think almost my very best—thirty years ago, when my trade was better than it is now. Yes, you gave me five pounds—or was it five pounds ten?—for this very work. And it is worth twelve pounds now—I assure you it is worth twelve pounds, if it is worth a penny."

"Will you give me ten pounds for it, then?" cried the other eagerly; "I want the money badly."

"No, I can't; but I will send you to a man who can and will. I do not speculate now; I never go to auctions. I am old, you see. Besides, I am poor. I will not buy your book, but I will send you to a man who will give you ten pounds for it, I am sure, and then he will sell it for fifteen." He wrote the address on a slip of paper. "Why, Mr. Farrar, if an old friend, so to speak, can put the question, why in the world——"

"The most natural thing," replied Mr. Farrar, with a cold laugh; "I am old, as I told you, and the younger men get all the work. That is all. Nobody wants a genealogist and antiquary."

"Dear me, dear me! Why, Mr. Farrar, I remember now; you used to know my poor son-in-law, who is dead eighteen years since. I was just reading the last letter he ever wrote me, just before he died. You used to come here and sit with him in the evening. I remember now. So you did.

"Thank you for your goodwill," said Mr. Farrar. "Yes, I remember your son-in-law. I knew him before his marriage."

"Did you? Before his marriage? Then——" He was going to add, "Then you can tell me his real name," but he paused, because it is a pity ever to acknowledge ignorance, and especially ignorance in such elementary matters as your son-in-law's name.

So Mr. Emblem checked himself.

"He ought to have been a rich man," Mr. Farrar continued; "but he quarrelled with his father, who cut him off with a shilling, I suppose."

Then the poor scholar, who could find no market for his learned papers, tied up his books again, and went away with hanging head.

"Ugh!" Mr. James, who had been listening, groaned as Mr. Farrar passed through the door. "Ugh! Call that a way of doing

business? Why, if it had been me, I'd have bought the book off of that old chap for a couple o' pounds, I would. Aye, or a sov, so seedy he is, and wants money so bad. And I know who'd have given twelve pound for it, in the trade too. Call that carrying on business? He may well add up his investments every day, if he can afford to chuck away such chances. Ah, but he'll retire soon." His fiery eyes brightened, and his face glowed with the joy of anticipation. "He must retire before long."

There came another visitor. This time it was a lanky boy, with a blue bag over his shoulder and a note-book and pencil-stump in his hand. He nodded to the assistant as to an old friend with whom one may be at ease, set down his bag, opened his note-book, and nibbled his stump. Then he read aloud, with a comma or semicolon between each, a dozen or twenty titles. They were the names of the books which his employer wished to pick up. The red-eyed assistant listened, and shook his head. Then the boy, without another word, shouldered his bag and departed, on his way to the next second-hand book-shop.

He was followed, at a decent interval, by another caller. This time it was an old gentleman who opened the door, put in his head, and looked about him with quick and suspicious glance. At sight of the assistant he nodded and smiled in the most friendly way possible, and came in.

"Good-morning, Mr. James: good-morning, my friend. Splendid weather. Pray don't disturb yourself. I am just having a look round—only a look round, you know. Don't move, Mr. James."

He addressed Mr. James, but he was looking at the shelves as he spoke, and, with the habit of a book-hunter, taking down the volumes, looking at the title-pages and replacing them; under his arm he carried a single volume in old leather binding.

Mr. James nodded his head, but did disturb himself; in fact, he rose with a scowl upon his face, and followed this polite old gentleman all round the shop, placing himself close to his elbow. One might almost suppose that he suspected him, so close and assiduous was his assistance. But the visitor, accepting these attentions as if they were customary, and the result of high breeding, went slowly round the shelves, taking down book after book, but buying none. Presently he smiled again, and said that he must be moving on, and very politely thanked Mr. James for his kindness.

"Nowhere," he was so good as to say, "does one get so much personal kindness and attention as at Emblem's. Good morning, Mr. James; good-morning, my friend."

Mr. James grunted, and closed the door after him.

"Ugh!" he said with disgust, "I know you; I know your likes. Want to make your set complete—eh? Want to sneak one of our books to do it with, don't you? Ah!" He looked into the back shop before he returned to his paste and his slips. "That was Mr. Potts, the great Queen Anne collector, sir. Most notorious book-

snatcher in all London, and the most barefaced. Wanted our fourth volume of the 'Athenian Oracle.' I saw his eyes reached out this way, and that way, and always resting on that volume. I saw him edging along to the shelf. Got another odd volume just like it in his wicked old hand, ready to change it when I wasn't looking."

"Ah," said Mr. Emblem, waking up from his dream of Iris and her father's letter; "ah, they will try it on. Keep your eyes open, James."

"No thanks, as usual," grumbled Mr. James, as he returned to his gum and his scissors. "Might as well have left him to snatch the book."

Here, however, James was wrong, because it is the first duty of an assistant to hinder and obstruct the book-snatcher, who carries on his work by methods of crafty and fraudulent exchange rather than by plain theft, which is a mere brutal way. For, first, the book-snatcher marks his prey; he finds the shop which has a set containing the volume which is missing in his own set; next, he arms himself with a volume which closely resembles the one he covets, and then, on pretence of turning over the leaves, he watches his opportunity to effect an exchange, and goes away rejoicing, his set complete. No collector, as is very well known, whether of books, coins, pictures, medals, fans, scarabs, book-plates, autographs, stamps, or anything else, has any conscience at all. Anybody can cut out slips and make a catalogue, but it requires a sharp assistant, with eyes all over his head like a spider, to be always on guard against this felonious and unscrupulous collector.

Next, there came two schoolboys together, who asked for and bought a crib to Virgil; and then a girl who wanted some cheap French reading-book. Just as the clock began to strike five, Mr. Emblem lifted his head and looked up. The shop-door opened, and there stepped in, rubbing his shoes on the mat as if he belonged to the house, an elderly gentleman of somewhat singular appearance. He wore a Fez cap, but was otherwise dressed as an Englishman—in black frock-coat, that is, buttoned up—except that his feet were encased in black cloth shoes, so that he went noiselessly. His hair was short and white, and he wore a small white beard; his skin was a rather dark brown; he was, in fact, a Hindoo, and his name was Lala Roy.

He nodded gravely to Mr. James, and walked into the back shop.

"It goes well," he asked, "with the buying and the selling?"

"Surely, Lala, surely."

"A quiet way of buying and selling; a way fit for one who meditates," said the Hindoo, looking round. "Tell me, my friend, what ails the child? Is she sick?"

"The child is well, Lala."

"Her mind wandered this morning. She failed to perceive a simple method which I tried to teach her. I feared she might be ill."

"She is not ill, my friend, but I think her mind is troubled."

"She is a woman. We are men. There is nothing in the world that is able to trouble the mind of the Philosopher."

"Nothing," said Mr. Emblem manfully, as if he too was a Disciple. "Nothing; is there now?"

The stoutness of the assertion was sensibly impaired by the question.

"Not poverty, which is a shadow; nor pain, which passes; nor the loss of woman's love, which is a gain; nor fall from greatness—nothing. Nevertheless"—his eyes did look anxious in spite of his philosophy—"this trouble of the child—will it soon be over?"

"I hope this evening," said Mr. Emblem. "Indeed, I am sure that it will be finished this evening."

"If the child had a mother, or a brother, or any protectors but ourselves, my friend, we might leave her to them. But she has nobody except you and me. I am glad that she is not ill."

He left Mr. Emblem, and passing through the door of communication between house and shop, went noiselessly up the stairs.

One more visitor—unusual for so many to call on a September afternoon. This time it was a youngish man of thirty or so, who stepped into the shop with an air of business, and, taking no notice at all of the assistant, walked swiftly into the back-shop and shut the door behind him.

"I thought so," murmured Mr. James. "After he's been counting up his investment, his lawyer calls. More investments."

Mr. David Chalker was a solicitor, and, according to his friends, who were proud of him, a sharp practitioner. He was, in fact, one of those members of the profession who, starting with no connection, have to make business for themselves. This, in London, they do by encouraging the county court, setting neighbours by the ears, lending money in small sums, fomenting quarrels, charging commissions, and generally making themselves a blessing and a boon to the district where they reside. But chiefly Mr. Chalker occupied himself with lending money.

"Now, Mr. Emblem," he said, not in a menacing tone, but as one who warns; "now, Mr. Emblem."

"Now, Mr. Chalker," the bookseller repeated mildly.

"What are you going to do for me?"

"I got your usual notice," the old bookseller began, hesitating, "six months ago."

"Of course you did. Three fifty is the amount. Three fifty, exactly."

"Just so. But I am afraid I am not prepared to pay off the Bill of Sale. The interest, as usual, will be ready."

"Of course it will. But this time the principal must be ready, too."

"Can't you get another client to find the money?"

"No, I can't. Money is tight, and your security, Mr. Emblem, isn't so good as it was."

"The furniture is there, and so is the stock."

"Furniture wears out; as for the stock—who knows what that is worth? All your books together may not be worth fifty pounds, for what I know."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Find the money yourself. Come, Mr. Emblem, everybody knows—your grandson himself told me—all the world knows—you've been for years saving up for your granddaughter. You told Joe only six months ago—you can't deny it—that whatever happened to you she would be well off."

Mr. Emblem did not deny the charge. But he ought not to have told this to his grandson, of all people in the world.

"As for Joe," Mr. Chalker went on, "you are going to do nothing for him. I know that. But is it business-like, Mr. Emblem, to waste good money which you might have invested for your granddaughter?"

"You do not understand, Mr. Chalker. You really do not, and I cannot explain. But about this Bill of Sale—never mind my granddaughter."

"You the aforesaid Richard Emblem"—Mr. Chalker began to recite, without commas—"have assigned to me David Chalker aforesaid his executors administrators and assigns all and singular the several chattels and things specifically described in the schedule hereto annexed by way of security for the payment of the sum of three hundred and fifty pounds and interest thereon at the rate of eight per cent. per annum."

"Thank you, Mr. Chalker. I know all that."

"You can't complain, I'm sure. It is five years since you borrowed the money."

"It was fifty pounds and a box of old law books out of your office, and I signed a bill for a hundred."

"You forget the circumstances."

"No, I do not. My grandson was a rogue. One does not readily forget that circumstance. He was also your friend, I remember."

"And I held my tongue."

"I have had no more money from you, and the sum has become three hundred and fifty."

"Of course you don't understand law, Mr. Emblem. How should you? But we lawyers don't work for nothing. However, it isn't what you got, but what I am to get. Come, my good sir, it's cutting off your nose to spite your face. Settle and have done with it, even if it does take a little slice off your granddaughter's fortune. Now, look here"—his voice became persuasive—"why not take me into your confidence? Make a friend of me. You want advice; let me advise you. I can get you good investments

—far better than you know anything of—good and safe investments—at six certain, and sometimes seven and even eight per cent. Make me your man of business—come now. As for this trumpery Bill of Sale—this trifle of three fifty, what is it to you? Nothing—nothing. And as for your intention to enrich your granddaughter, and cut off your grandson with a shilling, why, I honour you for it—there, though he was my friend. For Joe deserves it thoroughly. I've told him so, mind. You ask him. I've told him so a dozen times. I've said: 'The old man's right, Joe.' Ask him if I haven't."

This was very expansive, but somehow Mr. Emblem did not respond.

Presently, however, he lifted his head.

"I have three weeks still."

"Three weeks still."

"And if I do not find the money within three weeks?"

"Why—but of course you will; but if you do not—I suppose there will be only one thing left to do—realize the security—sell up—sticks, and books, and all."

"Thank you, Mr. Chalker. I will look round me, and—and—do my best. Good-day, Mr. Chalker."

"The best you can do, Mr. Emblem," returned the solicitor, "is to take me as your adviser. You trust David Chalker."

"Thank you. Good-day, Mr. Chalker."

On his way out, Mr. Chalker stopped for a moment and looked round the shop.

"How's business?" he asked the assistant.

"Dull, sir," replied Mr. James. "He throws it all away, and neglects his chances. Naturally, being so rich——"

"So rich, indeed!" the solicitor echoed.

"It will be bad for his successor," Mr. James went on, thinking how much he should himself like to be that successor. "The goodwill won't be worth half what it ought to be, and the stock is just falling to pieces."

Mr. Chalker looked about him again thoughtfully, and opened his mouth as if about to ask a question, but said nothing. He remembered, in time, that the shopman was not likely to know the amount of his master's capital or investments.

"There isn't a book even in the glass-case that's worth a five-pound note," continued Mr. James, whispering, "and he don't look about for purchases any more. Seems to have lost his pluck."

Mr. Chalker returned to the back-shop.

"Within three weeks, Mr. Emblem," he repeated; and then departed.

Mr. Emblem sat in his chair. He had to find three hundred and fifty pounds in three weeks. No one knew better than himself that this was impossible. Within three weeks! But in three weeks he would open the packet of letters, and give Iris her inheritance. At

least, she would not suffer. As for himself—— He looked round the little back-shop, and tried to recall the fifty years he had spent there, the books he had bought and sold, the money which had slipped through his fingers, the friends who had come and gone. Why, as for the books, he seemed to remember them every one—his joy in the purchase, his pride in possession, and his grief at letting them go. All the friends gone before him, his trade sunk to nothing.

"Yet," he murmured, "I thought it would last my time."

But the clock struck six. It was his tea-time. He rose mechanically, and went upstairs to Iris.

II.

FOX AND WOLF.

Mr. James, left to himself, attempted, in accordance with his daily custom, to commit a dishonourable action.

That is to say, he first listened carefully to the retreating footsteps of his master, as he went up the stairs; then he left his table, crept stealthily into the back-shop, and began to pull the drawers, turn the handle of the safe, and try the desk. Everything was carefully locked. Then he turned over all the papers on the table, but found nothing that contained the information he looked for. It was his daily practice thus to try the locks, in hope that some day the safe, or the drawers, or the desk would be left open by accident, when he might be able to solve a certain problem, the doubt and difficulty of which sore let and hindered him—namely, of what extent, and where placed, were those great treasures, savings, and investments, which enabled his master to be careless over his business. It was, further, customary with him to be thus frustrated and disappointed. Having briefly, therefore, also in accordance with his usual custom, expressed his disgust at this want of confidence between master and man, Mr. James returned to his paste and scissors.

About a quarter-past six the shop-door was cautiously opened, and a head appeared, which looked round stealthily. Seeing nobody about except Mr. James, the head nodded, and presently, followed by its body, stepped into the shop.

"Where's the Admiral, Foxy?" asked the caller.

"Guv'nor's upstairs, Mr. Joseph, taking of his tea with Miss Iris," replied Mr. James, not at all offended by the allusion to his craftiness.

Who should resemble the Fox if not the second-hand bookseller? In no trade, perhaps, can the truly admirable qualities of that animal—his patience, his subtlety and craft, his pertinacity,

his sagacity—be illustrated more to advantage. Mr. James felt a glow of virtue—would that he could grow daily and hourly, and more and more towards the Perfect Fox! Then, indeed, and not till then, would he be able to live truly up to his second-hand books.

"Having tea with Iris; well——"

The speaker looked as if it required some effort to receive this statement with resignation.

"He always does at six o'clock. Why shouldn't he?" asked Mr. James.

"Because, James, he spends the time in cockering up that gal whom he's ruined and spoiled—him and the old Nigger between them—so that her mind is poisoned against her lawful relations, and nothing will content her but coming into all the old man's money, instead of going share and share alike, as a cousin should, and especially a she-cousin, while there's a biscuit left in the locker and a drop of rum in the cask."

"Ah!" said Mr. James, with a touch of sympathy, called forth, perhaps, at the mention of the rum, which is a favourite drink with second-hand booksellers' assistants.

"Nothing too good for her," the other went on; "the best of education, pianos to play upon, and nobody good enough for her to know. Not on visiting terms, if you please, with her neighbours; waiting for Duchesses to call upon her. And what is she, after all? A miserable teacher!"

Mr. Joseph Gallop was a young man somewhere between twenty and thirty, tall, large-limbed, well set-up, and broad-shouldered. A young man who, at first sight, would seem eminently fitted to push his own fortunes. Also, at first sight, a remarkably handsome fellow, with straight, clear-cut features and light, curly hair. When he swung along the street, his round hat carelessly thrown back, and his handsome face lit up by the sun, the old women murmured a blessing upon his comely head—as they used to do, a long time ago, upon the comely and curly head of Absalom—and the young women looked meaningly at one another—as was also done in the case of Absalom—and the object of their admiration knew that they were saying to each other, in the feminine way, where a look is as good as a whisper, "There goes a handsome fellow." Those who knew him better, and had looked more closely into his face, said that his mouth was bad and his eyes shifty. The same opinion was held by the wiser sort as regards his character. For, on the one hand, some averred that to their certain knowledge Joe Gallop had shown himself a monster of ingratitude towards his grandfather, who had paid his debts and done all kinds of things for him; on the other hand, there were some who thought he had been badly treated: and some said that no good would ever come of a young fellow who was never able to remain in the same situation more than a month or so; and others said that he had certainly been unfortunate, but that he was a quick and clever young man, who would

some day find the kind of work that suited him, and then he would show everybody of what stuff he was composed. As for us, we have only to judge of him by his actions.

"Perhaps, Mr. Joseph," said Mr. James, "perhaps Miss Iris won't have all bequeathed to her."

"Do you know anything?" Joe asked quickly. "Has he made a new will lately?"

"Not that I know of. But Mr. Chalker has been here off and on a good bit now."

"Ah! Chalker's a close one, too. Else he'd tell me, his old friend. Look here, Foxy," he turned a beaming and smiling face upon the Assistant. "If you should see anything or find anything out, tell me, mind. And, remember, I'll make it worth your while."

Mr. James looked as if he was asking himself how Joseph could make it worth his while, seeing that he got nothing more from his grandfather, and by his own showing never would have anything more.

"It's only his will I'm anxious to know about; that, and where he's put away all his money. Think what a dreadful thing it would be for his heirs if he were to go and die suddenly, and none of us to know where his investments are. As for the shop, that is already disposed of, as I dare say you know."

"Disposed of? The shop disposed of! Oh, Lord!" The Assistant turned pale. "Oh, Mr. Joseph," he asked earnestly, "what will become of the shop? And who is to have it?"

"I am to have it," Mr. Joseph replied calmly. This was the Lie Absolute, and he invented it very cleverly and at the right moment—a thing which gives strength and life to a Lie, because he already suspected the truth and guessed the secret hope and ambition which possesses every ambitious Assistant in this trade—namely, to get the succession. Mr. James looked upon himself as the lawful and rightful heir to the business. But sometimes he entertained grievous doubts, and now indeed his heart sank into his boots. "I am to have it," Joe repeated.

"Oh, I didn't know. You are to have it, then? Oh!"

If Mr. James had been ten years younger, I think he would have burst into tears. But at the age of five-and-thirty weeping no longer presents itself as a form of relief. It is more usual to seek consolation in a swear. He stammered, however, while he turned pale, and then red, and then pale again.

"Yes, quite proper, Mr. Joseph, I'm sure, and a most beautiful business may be made again here by one who understands the way. Oh, you are a lucky man, Mr. Joseph. You are indeed, sir, to get such a noble chance."

"The shop," he went on, "was settled—settled upon me, long ago." The verb "to settle" is capable of conveying large and vague impressions. "But after all, what's the good of this place to a sailor?"

"The good—the good of this place?" Mr. James's cheek flushed.

"Why, to make money, to be sure—to coin money in. If I had this place to myself—why—why, in two years I would be making as much as two hundred a year. I would indeed."

"You want to make money. Bah! That's all you fellows think of. To sit in the back-shop all day long and to sell mouldy books! We jolly sailor-boys know better than that, my lad."

There really was something nautical about the look of the man. He wore a black-silk tie, in a sailor's running knot, the ends loose; his waistcoat was unbuttoned, and his coat was a kind of jacket; not to speak of his swinging walk and careless pose. In fact, he had been a sailor; he had made two voyages to India and back as assistant-purser, or purser's clerk, on board a P. and O. boat, but some disagreement with his commanding officer concerning negligence, or impudence, or drink, or laziness—he had been charged in different situations and at different times with all these vices, either together or separately—caused him to lose his rating on the ship's books. However, he brought away from his short nautical experience, and preserved, a certain nautical swagger, which accorded well with his appearance, and gave him a swashbuckler air, which made those who knew him well lament that he had not graced the Elizabethan era, when he might have become a gallant buccaneer, and so got himself shot through the head; or that he had not flourished under the reign of good Queen Anne, when he would probably have turned pirate and been hanged: or that, being born in the Victorian age, he had not gone to the far West, where he would, at least, have had the chance of getting shot in a gambling-saloon.

"As for me, when I get the business," he continued, "I shall look about for some one to carry it on until I am able to sell it for what it will fetch. Books at a penny apiece all round, I suppose"—James gasped—"shop furniture thrown in"—James panted—"and the goodwill for a small lump sum." James wondered how far his own savings, and what he could borrow, might go towards that lump sum, and how much might "remain." "My grandfather, as you know, of course, is soon going to retire from business altogether." This was another Lie Absolute, as Mr. Emblem had no intention whatever of retiring.

"Soon, Mr. Joseph? He has never said a word to me about it."

"Very soon, now—sooner than you expect. At seventy-five, and with all his money, why should he go on slaving any longer? Very soon, indeed. Any day."

"Mr. Joseph," the Assistant positively trembled with eagerness and apprehension.

"What is it, James? Did you really think that a man like me was going to sit in a back-shop among these mouldy volumes all day? Come, that's too good. You might have given me credit for being one cut above a counter, too. I am a gentleman, James, if you please; I am an officer and a gentleman."

He then proceeded to explain, in language that smacked some-

thing of the sea, that his ideas soared far above trade, which was, at best, a contemptible occupation, and quite unworthy of a gentleman, particularly of an officer and a gentleman; and that his personal friends would never condescend even to formal acquaintance, not to speak of friendship, with trade. This discourse may be omitted. When one reads about such a man as Joe Gallop, when we are told how he looked and what he said and how he said it, with what gestures and in what tone, we feel as if it would be impossible for the simplest person in the world to be mistaken as to his real character. My friends, especially my young friends, so far from the discernment of character being easy, it is, on the contrary, an art most difficult, and very rarely attained. Nature's indications are a kind of handwriting, the characters in which are known to few, so that, for instance, the quick, inquiring glance of an eye, in which one may easily read—who knows the character—treachery, lying, and deception, just as in the letter Beth was originally easily discerned the effigies of a house, may very easily pass unread by the multitude. The language, or rather the alphabet, is much less complicated than the cuneiform of the Medes and Persians; yet no one studies it, except women, most of whom are profoundly skilled in this lore, which makes them so fearfully and wonderfully wise. Thus it is easy for man to deceive his brother man, but not his sister woman. Again, most of us are glad to take everybody on his own statements; there are, or may be, we are all ready to acknowledge, with sorrow for erring humanity, somewhere else in the world, such things as pretending, swindling, acting a part, and cheating, but they do not and cannot belong to our own world. Mr. James, the Assistant, very well knew Mr. Emblem's grandson had already, though still young, as bad a record as could be desired by any; that he had been turned out of one situation after another; that his grandfather had long since refused to help him any more; that he was always to be found in the Broad Path which leadeth to destruction. When he had money he ran down that path as fast as his legs could carry him; when he had none, he only walked and wished he could run. But he never left it, and never wished to leave it. Knowing all this, the man accepted and believed every word of Joe's story. James believed it, because he hoped it. He listened respectfully to Joe's declamation on the meanness of trade, and then he rubbed his hands, and said humbly that he ventured to hope, when the sale of the business came on, Mr. Joseph would let him have a chance.

"You?" asked Joe. "I never thought of you. But why not? Why not, I say? Why not you as well as anybody else?"

"Nobody but me, Mr. Joseph, knows what the business is, and how it might be improved; and I could make arrangements for paying by regular instalments."

"Well, we'll talk about it when the time comes. I won't forget.

Sailors, you know, can't be expected to understand the value of shops. Say, James, what does the Commodore do all day?"

"Sits in there and adds up his investments."

"Always doing that—eh? Always adding 'em up? Ah! and you've never get a chance of looking over his shoulder, I suppose?"

"Never."

"You may find that chance, one of these days. I should like to know, if only for curiosity, what they are and where they are. He sits in there and adds 'em up. Yes—I've seen him at it. There must be thousands by this time."

"Thousands," said the Assistant, in the belief that the more you add up a sum the larger it grows.

Joe walked into the back-shop and tried the safe.

"Where are the keys?" he asked.

"Always in his pocket or on the table before him. He don't leave them about."

"Or you'd ha' known pretty sharp all there is to know—eh, my lad? Well, you're a Foxy one, you are, if ever there was one. Let's be pals, you and me. When the old man goes, you want the shop—well, I don't see why you shouldn't have the shop. Somebody must have the shop: and it will be mine to do what I please with. As for his savings, he says they are all for Iris—well, wills have been set aside before this. Do you think now, seriously, do you think, James, that the old man is quite right—eh? Don't answer in a hurry. Do you think, now, that he is quite right in his chump?"

James laughed.

"He's right enough, though he throws away his chances."

"Throws away his chances. How the deuce can he be all right, then? Did you ever hear of a bookseller in his right mind throwing away his chances?"

"Why—no—for that matter——"

"Very well, then; for that matter, don't forget that you've seen him throw away all his chances—all his chances, you said. You are ready to swear to that. Most important evidence, that, James." James had not said "all," but he grunted, and the other man went on: "It may come in useful, this recollection. Keep your eyes wide open, my red-haired pirate. As for the mouldy old shop, you may consider it as good as your own. Why, I suppose you'll get somebody else to handle the paste-brush and the scissors, and tie up the parcels, and water the shop—eh? You'll be too proud to do that for yourself, you will."

Mr. James grinned and rubbed his hands.

"All your own—eh? Well, you'll wake 'em up a bit, won't you?"

Mr. James grinned again—he continued grinning.

"Go on, Mr. Joseph," he said; "go on—I like it."

"Consider the job as settled, then. As for terms, they shall be easy; I'm not a hard man. And—I say, Foxy, about that safe?"

Mr. James suddenly ceased grinning, because he observed a look in his patron's eyes which alarmed him.

"About that safe. You must find out for me where the old man has put his money, and what it is worth. Do you hear? Or else——"

"How can I find out? He won't tell me any more than you."

"Or else you must put me in the way of finding out." Mr. Joseph lowered his voice to a whisper. "He keeps the keys on the table before him. When a customer takes him out here, he leaves the keys behind him. Do you know the key of the safe?"

"Yes, I know it."

"What is to prevent a clever, quick-eyed fellow like you, mate, stepping in with a bit of wax—eh? While he is talking, you know. You could rush in in a moment."

"It's—it's dangerous, Mr. Joseph."

"So it is—rather dangerous—not much. What of that?"

"I would do anything I could to be of service to you, Mr. Joseph; but that's not honest, and it's dangerous."

"Dangerous! There's danger on the briny deep and shipwreck in the blast, if you come to danger. Do we, therefore, jolly mariners afloat, ever think of that? Never. As to honesty, don't make a man sick."

"Look here, Mr. Joseph. If you'll give me a promise in writing, that I'm to have the shop, as soon as you get it, at a fair valuation and easy terms—say ten per cent. down, and——"

"Stow it, mate; write what you like, and I'll sign it. Now about that key?"

"Supposing you was to get a duplicate key, and supposing you was to get into trouble about it, Mr. Joseph, should you—should you—I only put it to you—should you up and round upon the man as got you that key?"

"Foxy, you are as suspicious as a Chinaman. Well, then, do it this way. Send it me in a letter, and then who is to know where the letter came from?"

The Assistant nodded.

"Then I think I can do the job, though not, perhaps, your way. But I think I can do it. I won't promise for a day or two."

"There you spoke like an honest pal and a friendly shipmate! Dangerous! Of course it is. When the roaring winds do blow—— Hands upon it, brother. Foxy, you've never done a better day's work. You are too crafty for any sailor—you are, indeed. Here, just for a little key——"

"Hush, Mr. Joseph! Oh, pray—pray don't talk so loud! You don't know who may be listening. There's Mr. Lala Loy. You never hear him coming."

"Just for a trifle of a key you are going to get possession of the best book-shop in all Chelsea. Well, keep your eyes skinned and the wax ready, will you? And now, James, I'll be off."

"Oh, I say, Mr. Joseph, wait a moment!" James was beginning to realize what he had promised. "If anything dreadful should come of this? I don't know what is in the safe. There may be money as well as papers."

"James, do you think I would steal? Do you mean to insinuate that I am a thief, sir? Do you dare to suspect that I would take money?"

James certainly looked as if he had thought even that possible.

"I shall open the safe, take out the papers, read them, and put them back just as I found them. Will that do for you?"

He shook hands again, and took himself off.

At seven o'clock Mr. Emblem came downstairs again.

"Has anyone been?" he asked as usual.

"Only Mr. Joseph."

"What might Mr. Joseph want?"

"Nothing at all."

"Then," said his grandfather, "Mr. Joseph might just as well have kept away."

Let us anticipate a little. James spent the next day hovering about in the hope that an opportunity would offer of getting the key in his possession for a few moments. There was no opportunity. The bunch of keys lay on the table under the old man's eyes all day, and when he left the table he carried them with him. But the day afterwards he got his chance. One of the old customers called to talk over past bargains and former prizes. Mr. Emblem came out of the back-shop with his visitor, and continued talking with him as far as the door. As he passed the table—James's table—he rested the hand which carried the keys on it, and left them there. James pounced upon them and slipped them into his pocket noiselessly. Mr. Emblem returned to his own chair and thought nothing of the keys for an hour and a half by the clock, and during this period James was out on business. When Mr. Emblem remembered his keys, he felt for them in their usual place, and missed them, and then began searching about and cried out to James that he had lost his bunch of keys.

"Why, sir, sir," said James, bringing them to him, after a little search, and with a very red face, "here they are; you must have left them on my table."

And in this way the job was done.

III.

IRIS THE HERALD.

By a somewhat remarkable coincidence it was on this very evening that Iris first made the acquaintance of her pupil, Mr. Arnold Arbuthnot. These coincidences, I believe, happen oftener in real

life than they do even on the stage, where people are always turning up at the very nick of time and the critical moment.

I need little persuasion to make me believe that the first meeting of Arnold Arbuthnot and Iris, on the very evening when her cousin was opening matters with the Foxy one, was nothing short of Providential. You shall see, presently, what things might have happened if they had not met. The meeting was, in fact, the second of the three really important events in the life of a girl. The first, which is seldom remembered with the gratitude which it deserves, is her birth ; the second, the first meeting with her future lover ; the third, her wedding-day ; the other events of a woman's life are interesting, perhaps, but not important.

Certain circumstances, which will be immediatelyexplained, connected with this meeting, made it an event of very considerable interest to Iris, even though she did not suspect its immense importance. So much interest that she thought of nothing else for a week beforehand ; that as the appointed hour drew near she trembled and grew pale ; that when her grandfather came up for his tea, she, who was usually so quick to discern the least sign of care or anxiety in his face, actually did not observe the trouble, plainly written in his drooping head and anxious eyes, which was due to his interview with Mr. David Chalker.

She poured out the tea, therefore, without one word of sympathy. This would have seemed hard if her grandfather had expected any. He did not, however, because he did not know that the trouble showed in his face, and was trying to look as if nothing had happened. Yet in his brain were ringing and resounding the words "Within three weeks—within three weeks," with the regularity of a horrid clock at midnight, when one wants to go to sleep.

"Oh," cried Iris, forced, as young people always are, to speak of her own trouble, "oh, grandfather, he is coming to-night."

"Who is coming to-night, my dear ?" and then he listened again for the ticking of that clock : "Within three weeks—within three weeks." "Who is coming to-night, my dear ?"

He took the cup of tea from her, and sat down with an old man's deliberation, which springs less from wisdom and the fulness of thought than from respect to rheumatism.

The iteration of that refrain, "Within three weeks," made him forget everything, even the trouble of his granddaughter's mind.

"Oh, grandfather, you cannot have forgotten !"

She spoke with the least possible touch of irritation, because she had been thinking of this thing for a week past, day and night, and it was a thing of such stupendous interest to her, that it seemed impossible that anyone who knew of it could forget what was coming.

"No, no." The old man was stimulated into immediate recollection by the disappointment in her eyes. "No, no, my dear, I have not forgotten. Your pupil is coming. Mr. Arbuthnot is coming.

But, Iris, child, don't let that worry you. I will see him for you, if you like."

"No; I must see him myself. You see, dear, there is the awful deception. Oh, how shall I tell him?"

"No deception at all," he said stoutly. "You advertised in your own initials. He never asked if the initials belonged to a man or to a woman. The other pupils do not know. Why should this one? What does it matter to him if you have done the work for which he engaged your services?"

"But, oh, he is so different! And the others, you know, keep to the subject."

"So should he, then. Why didn't he?"

"But he hasn't. And I have been answering him, and he must think that I was drawing him on to tell me more about himself; and now—oh, what will he think? I drew him on and on—yet I didn't mean to—till at last he writes to say that he regards me as the best friend and the wisest adviser he has ever had. What will he think and say? Grandfather, it is dreadful!"

"What did you tell him for, Iris, my dear? Why couldn't you let things go on? And by telling him you will lose your pupil."

"Yes, of course: and, worse still, I shall lose his letters. We live so quietly here that his letters have come to me like news of another world. How many different worlds are there all round one in London? It has been pleasant to read of that one in which ladies go about beautifully dressed always, and where the people have nothing to do but to amuse themselves. He has told me about this world in which he lives, and about his own life, so that I know everything he does, and where he goes; and"—here she sighed heavily—"of course it could not go on for ever; and I should not mind so much if it had not been carried on under false pretences."

"No false pretences at all, my dear. Don't think it."

"I sent back his last cheque," she said, trying to find a little consolation for herself. "But yet——"

"Well, Iris," said her grandfather, "he wanted to learn heraldry, and you have taught him."

"For the last three months"—the girl blushed as if she was confessing her sins—"for the last three months there has not been a single word in his letters about heraldry. He tells me that he writes because he is idle, or because he wants to talk, or because he is alone in his studio, or because he wants his unknown friend's advice. I am his unknown friend, and I have been giving him advice."

"And very good advice, too," said her grandfather benevolently. "Who is so wise as my Iris?"

"I have answered all his letters, and never once told him that I am only a girl."

"I am glad you did not tell him, Iris," said her grandfather; but he did not say why he was glad. "And why can't he go on writing his letters without making any fuss?"

"Because he says he must make the acquaintance of the man—the man, he says—with whom he has been in correspondence so long. This is what he says."

She opened a letter which lay upon a table covered with papers, but her grandfather stopped her.

"Well, my dear, I do not want to know what he says. He wishes to make your acquaintance. Very good, then. You are going to see him, and to tell him who you are. That is enough. But as for deceiving——" He paused, trying to understand this extreme scrupulosity of conscience. "If you come to deceiving—well, in a kind of a sort of way you did allow him to think his correspondent a man—I admit that. What harm is done to him? None. He won't be so mean, I suppose, as to ask for his money back again?"

"I think he ought to have it all back," said Iris; "yes, all, from the very beginning. I am ashamed that I ever took money from him; my face burns when I think of it."

To this her grandfather made no reply. The returning of money paid for services rendered was, to his commercial mind, too foolish a thing to be even talked about. At the same time, Iris was quite free to manage her own affairs. And then there was that roll of papers in the safe. Why, what matter if she sent away all her pupils? He changed the subject.

"Iris, my dear," he said, "about this other world, where the people amuse themselves; the world which lives in the squares and in the big houses on the Chelsea Embankment here, you know—how should you like, just for a change, to belong to that world, and have no work to do?"

"I don't know," she replied carelessly, because the question did not interest her.

"You would have to leave me, of course. You would sever your connection, as they say, with the shop."

"Please, don't let us talk nonsense, grandfather."

"You would have to be ashamed, perhaps, of ever having taught for your living."

"Now, that I never should be—never: not if they made me a duchess."

"You would go dressed in silk and velvet. My dear, I should like to see you dressed up just for once, as we have seen them at the theatre."

"Well, I should like one velvet dress in my life—only one; and it should be crimson—a beautiful, deep, dark crimson."

"Very good. And you would drive in a carriage instead of an omnibus; you would sit in the stalls instead of the upper circle; you would give quantities of money to poor people; and you would buy as many second-hand books as you pleased. There are rich people, I believe—ostentatious people—who buy new books. But you, my dear, have been better brought up. No books are worth

buying till they have stood the criticism of a whole generation at least. Never buy new books, my dear."

"I won't," said Iris. "But, you dear old man, what have you got in your head to-night? Why in the world should we talk about getting rich?"

"I was only thinking," he said, "that perhaps you might be so much happier——"

"Happier? Nonsense! I am as happy as I can be. Six pupils already. To be sure, I have lost one," she sighed; "and the best among them all."

When her grandfather left her, Iris placed candles on the writing-table, but did not light them, though it was already pretty dark. She had half an hour to wait; and she wanted to think, and candles are not necessary for meditation. She sat at the open window, and suffered her thoughts to ramble where they pleased. This is a restful thing to do, especially if your windows look upon a tolerably busy but not noisy London road. For then it is almost as good as sitting beside a swiftly-running steam; the movement of the people below is like the unceasing flow of the current; the sound of the footsteps is like the whisper of the water along the bank; the echo of the half-heard talk strikes your ear like the mysterious voices wafted to the banks from the boats as they go by; and the lights of the shops and the street presently become spectral and unreal, like lights seen upon the river in the evening.

Iris had a good many pupils—six, in fact, as she had boasted; why, then, was she so strangely disturbed on account of one?

An old tutor by correspondence may be, and very likely is, indifferent about his pupils, because he has had so many; but Iris was a young tutor, and had as yet known few. One of her pupils, for instance, was a gentleman in the fruit and potato line, in the Borough. By reason of his early education, which had not been neglected so much as entirely omitted, he was unable to personally conduct his accounts. Now, a merchant without his accounts is as helpless as a Tourist without his Cook. So that he desired, in his mature age, to learn book-keeping, compound addition, subtraction, and multiplication. He had no partners, so that he did not want Division. But it is difficult—say, well-nigh impossible—for a middle-aged merchant, not trained in the graces of letter-writing, to inspire a young lady with personal regard, even though she is privileged to follow the current of his thoughts day by day, and to set him his sums.

Next there was a young fellow of nineteen or twenty, who was beginning life as an assistant-teacher in a commercial school at Lower Clapton. This way is a stony and a thorny path to tread; no one walks upon it willingly; those who are compelled to enter upon it speedily either run away and enlist, or they go and find a secluded spot in which to hang themselves. The smoother ways of the profession are only to be entered by one who is the possessor

of a degree; and it was the determination of this young man to pass the London University Examinations, and obtain the degree of Bachelor. In this way his value in the Educational market would be at once doubled, and he could command a better place and lighter work. He showed himself, in his letters, to be an eminently practical, shrewd, selfish, and thick-skinned young man, who would quite certainly get on in the world, and was resolved to lose no opportunities, and, with that view, he took as much work out of his tutor as he could get for the money. Had he known that the "I. A." who took such a wonderful amount of trouble with his papers was only a woman, he would certainly have extorted a great deal more work for his money. All this Iris read in his letters and understood. There is no way in which a man more surely and more naturally reveals his true character than in his correspondence, so that, after a while, even though the subject of the letters be nothing more interesting than the studies in hand, those who write the letters may learn to know each other if they have but the mother-wit to read between the lines. Certainly this young schoolmaster did not know Iris, nor did he desire to discover what she was like, being wholly occupied with the study of himself. Strange and kindly provision of Nature. The less desirable a man actually appears to others, the more fondly he loves and believes in himself. I have heard it whispered that Narcissus was a hunchback.

Then there was another pupil, a girl who was working her very hardest in order to become, as she hoped, a first-class governess, and who, poor thing! by reason of natural thickness would never reach even the third rank. Iris would have been sorry for her, because she worked so fiercely, and was so stupid, but there was something hard and unsympathetic in her nature which forbade pity. She was miserably poor, too, and had an unsuccessful father, no doubt as stupid as herself, and made pitiful excuses for not forwarding the slender fees with regularity.

Everybody who is poor should be, on that ground alone, worthy of pity and sympathy. But the hardness, and stupidity, and the ill-temper, all combined and clearly shown in her letters, repelled her tutor. Iris, who drew imaginary portraits of her pupils, pictured the girl as plain to look upon, with a dull eye, a leathery, pallid cheek, a forehead without sunshine upon it, and lips which seldom parted with a smile.

Then there was, besides, a Cambridge undergraduate. He was neither clever, nor industrious, nor very ambitious; he thought that a moderate place was quite good enough for him to aim at, and he found that this unknown and obscure tutor by correspondence was cheap and obliging, and willing to take trouble, and quite as efficacious for his purposes as the most expensive Cambridge coach. Iris presently discovered that he was lazy and luxurious, a deceiver of himself, a dweller in Fool's Paradise, and a consistent shirker

of work. Therefore, she disliked him. Had she actually known him and talked with him, she might have liked him better, in spite of these faults and shortcomings, for he was really a pleasant, easy-going youth, who wallowed in intellectual sloth, but loved physical activity; who will presently drop easily, and comfortably, and without an effort or a doubt, into the bosom of the Church, and will develop later on into an admirable country parson, unless they disestablish the Establishment; in which case, I do not know what he will do.

But this other man—this man who was coming for an explanation, this Mr. Arnold Arbuthnot, was, if you please, a very different kind of pupil. In the first place, he was a gentleman, a fact which he displayed, but not ostentatiously, in every line of his letters: next, he had come to her for instruction—the only pupil she had in that science, in heraldry, which she loved. It is far more pleasant to be describing a shield and setting questions in the queer old language of this queer old science, than in solving and proposing problems in trigonometry and conic sections. And then—how if your pupil begins to talk round the subject and to wander into other things? You cannot very well talk round a branch of mathematics, but heraldry is a subject surrounded by fields, meadows, and lawns, so to speak, all covered with beautiful flowers. Into these the pupil wandered, and Iris not unwillingly followed. Thus the teaching of heraldry by correspondence became the most delightful interchange of letters imaginable, set off and enriched with a curious and strange piquancy, derived from the fact that one of them, supposed to be an elderly man, was a young girl, ignorant of the world except from books, and the advice given her by two old men, who formed all her society. Then, as was natural, what was at first a kind of play, became before long a serious and earnest confidence on the one side, and a hesitating reception on the other.

Latterly he more than once amused himself by drawing an imaginary portrait of her: it was a pleasing portrait, but it made her feel uneasy.

"I know you," he said, "from your letters, but yet I want to know you in person. I think you are a man advanced in years." Poor Iris! and she not yet twenty-one. "You sit in your study and read; you wear glasses, and your hair is grey; you have a kind heart and a cheerful voice; you are not rich—you have never tried to make yourself rich; you are therefore little versed in the ways of mankind; you take your ideas chiefly from books; the few friends you have chosen are true and loyal; you are full of sympathy, and quick to read the thoughts of those in whom you take an interest." A very fine character, but it made Iris's cheek to burn and her eyes to drop. To be sure, she was not rich, nor did she know the world; so far her pupil was right, but yet she

was not grey nor old. And, again, she was not, as he thought, a man.

Letter-writing is not extinct, as it is a commonplace to affirm, and as people would have us believe. Letters are written still—the most delightful letters—letters as copious, as charming as any of the last century; but men and women no longer write their letters as carefully as they used to do in the old days, because they were then shown about, and very likely read aloud. Our letters, therefore, though their sentences are not so balanced nor their periods so rounded, are more real, more truthful, more spontaneous, and more delightful than the laborious productions of our ancestors who had to weigh every phrase, and to think out their bons mots, epigrams, and smart things for weeks beforehand, so that the letter might appear full of impromptu wit. I should like, for instance, just for once, to rob the Outward or the Homeward Mail, in order to read all the delightful letters which go every week backwards and forwards between the folk in India and the folk at home.

"I shall lose my letters," Iris reflected, and her heart sank. Not only did her correspondent begin to draw these imaginary portraits of her, but he proceeded to urge upon her to come out of her concealment, and to grant him an interview. This she might have refused in her desire to continue a correspondence which brightened her monotonous life. But there came another thing, and this decided her. He began to give, and to ask, opinions concerning love, marriage, and such topics—and then she perceived it could not possibly be discussed with him, even in domino and male disguise. "As for love," her pupil wrote, "I suppose it is a real and not a fancied necessity of life. A man, I mean, may go on a long time without it, but there will come a time—do not you think so?—when he is bound to feel the incompleteness of life without a woman to love. We ought to train our boys and girls from the very beginning to regard love and marriage as the only things really worth having, because without them there is no happiness. Give me your own experience. I am sure you must have been in love at some time or other in your life."

Anybody will understand that Iris could not possibly give her own experience in love-matters, nor could she plunge into speculative philosophy of this kind with her pupil. Obviously the thing must come to an end. Therefore she wrote a letter to him, telling him that "I. A." would meet him, if he pleased, that very evening at the hour of eight.

It is by this time sufficiently understood that Iris Aglen professed to teach—it is an unusual combination—mathematics and heraldry; she might also have taught equally well, had she chosen, sweetness of disposition, goodness of heart, the benefits conferred by pure and lofty thoughts on the expression of a girl's face, and the way to acquire all the other gracious, maidenly virtues; but either there is too limited a market for these branches of culture, or—which is

perhaps the truer reason—there are so many English girls, not to speak of Americans, who are ready and competent to teach them, and do teach them to their brothers, and their lovers, and to each other, and to their younger sisters, all day long.

As for her heraldry, it was natural that she should acquire that science, because her grandfather knew as much as any Pursuivant or King-at-Arms, and thought that by teaching the child a science which is nowadays cultivated by so few, he was going to make her fortune. Besides, ever mindful of the secret packet, he thought that an heiress ought to understand heraldry. It was, indeed, as you shall see, in this way that her fortune was made; but yet not quite in the way he proposed to make it. Nobody ever makes a fortune quite in the way at first intended for him.

As for her mathematics, it is no wonder that she was good in this science, because she was a pupil of Lala Roy.

This learned Bengalee condescended to acknowledge the study of mathematics as worthy even of the Indian intellect, and amused himself with them when he was not more usefully engaged in chess. He it was who, being a lodger in the house, taught Iris almost as soon as she could read how letters placed side by side may be made to signify and to accomplish stupendous things, and how they may disguise the most graceful and beautiful curves, and how they may even open a way into boundless space, and there disclose marvels. This wondrous world did the philosopher open to the ready and quick-witted girl: nor did he ever lead her to believe that it was at all an unusual or an extraordinary thing for a girl to be so quick and apt for science as herself, nor did he tell her that if she went to Newnham or to Girton, extraordinary glories would await her, with the acclamations of the multitude in the Senate House and the praise of the Moderators. Iris, therefore, was not proud of her mathematics, which seemed part of her very nature. But of her heraldry she was, I fear, extremely proud—proud even to sinfulness. No doubt this was the reason why, through her heraldry, the humiliation of this evening fell upon her.

"If he is young," she thought, "if he is young—and he is sure to be young—he will be very angry at having opened his mind to a girl"—it will be perceived that, although she knew so much mathematics, she was really very ignorant of the opposite sex, not to know that a young man likes nothing so much as the opening of his mind to a young lady. "If he is old, he will be more humiliated still"—as if any man at any age was ever humiliated by confessing himself to a woman. "If he is a proud man, he will never forgive me. Indeed, I am sure that he can never forgive me, whatever kind of man he is. But I can do no more than tell him I am sorry. If he will not forgive me then, what more can I say? Oh, if he should be vindictive!"

When the clock began to strike the hour of eight, Iris lighted her

candles, and before the pulsation of the last stroke had died away, she heard the ringing of the house-bell.

The door was opened by her grandfather himself, and she heard his voice.

"Yes," he said, "you will find your tutor, in the first-floor front, alone. If you are inclined to be vindictive, when you hear all, please ring the bell for me."

The visitor mounted the stairs, and Iris, hearing his step, began to tremble and to shake for fear.

When the door opened she did not at first look up. But she knew that her pupil was there, and that he was looking for his tutor.

"Pardon me"—the voice was not unpleasant—"pardon me. I was directed to this room. I have an appointment with my tutor."

"If," said Iris, rising, for the time for confession had at length arrived, "if you are Mr. Arnold Arbuthnot, your appointment is, I believe, with me."

"It is with my tutor," he said.

"I am your tutor. My initials are I. A."

The room was only lighted by two candles, but they showed him the hanging head and the form of a woman, and he thought she looked young, judging by the outline. Her voice was sweet and clear.

"My tutor? You?"

"If you really are Mr. Arnold Arbuthnot, the gentleman who has corresponded with I. A. for the last two years on heraldry, and —and other things, I am your tutor."

She had made the dreaded confession. The rest would be easy. She even ventured to raise her eyes, and she perceived, with a sinking of the heart, that her estimate of her pupil's age was tolerably correct. He was a young man, apparently not more than five or six and twenty.

It now remained to be seen if he was vindictive.

As for the pupil, when he recovered a little from the blow of this announcement, he saw before him a girl, quite young, dressed in a simple grey or drab-coloured stuff, which I have reason to believe is called Carmelite. The dress had a crimson kerchief arranged in folds over the front, and a lace collar, and at first sight it made the beholder feel that, considered merely as a setting of face and figure, it was remarkably effective. Surely this is the true end and aim of all feminine adornment, apart from the elementary object of keeping one warm.

"I—I did not know," the young man said, after a pause, "I did not know at all that I was corresponding with a lady."

Here she raised her eyes again, and he observed that the eyes were very large and full of light—"eyes like the fishpools of Heshbon"—dove's eyes.

"I am very sorry," she said meekly. "It was my fault."

He observed other things now, having regained the use of his

senses. Thus he saw that she wore her hair, which was of a wonderful chestnut-brown colour, parted at the side like a boy's, and that she had not committed the horrible enormity of cutting it short. He observed, too, that while her lips were quivering and her cheek was blushing, her look was steadfast. Are dove's eyes, he asked himself, always steadfast?

"I ought to have told you long ago, when you began to write about—about yourself and other things, when I understood that you thought I was a man—oh, long ago I ought to have told you the truth!"

"It is wonderful!" said the young man, "it is truly wonderful!" He was thinking of the letters—long letters, full of sympathy, and a curious unworldly wisdom which she had sent him in reply to his own, and he was comparing them with her youthful face, as one involuntarily compares a poet's appearance with his poetry—generally a disappointing thing to do, and always a foolish thing.

"I am very sorry," she repeated.

"Have you many pupils, like myself?"

"I have several pupils in mathematics. It does not matter to them whether they are taught by a man or a woman. In heraldry I had only one—you."

He looked round the room. One end was occupied by shelves, filled with books; in one of the windows was a table, covered with papers and adorned with a type-writer, by means of which Iris carried on her correspondence. For a moment the unworthy thought crossed his mind that he had been, perhaps, artfully lured on by a Siren for his destruction. Only for a moment, however, because she raised her face and met his gaze again, with eyes so frank and innocent, that he could not doubt them. Besides, there was the clear outline of her face, so truthful and so honest. The young man was an artist, and therefore believed in outline. Could any sane and intelligent creature doubt those curves of cheek and chin?

"I have put together," she said, "all your letters for you. Here they are. Will you, please, take them back? I must not keep them any longer." He took them, and bowed. "I made this appointment, as you desired, to tell you the truth, because I have deceived you too long; and to beg you to forgive me; and to say that, of course, there is an end to our correspondence."

"Thank you. It shall be as you desire. Exactly," he repeated, "as you desire."

He ought to have gone at once. There was nothing more to say. Yet he lingered, holding the letters in his hand.

"To write these letters," he said, "has been for a long time one of my greatest pleasures, partly because I felt that I was writing to a friend, and so wrote in full trust and confidence, partly because they procured me a reply—in the shape of your letters. Must I take back these letters of mine?"

She made no answer.

"It is hard, is it not, to lose a friend so slowly acquired, thus suddenly and unexpectedly?"

"Yes," she said, "it is hard. I am very sorry. It was my fault."

"Perhaps I have said something, in my ignorance—something which ought not to have been said or written—something careless—something which has lowered me in your esteem——"

"Oh, no—no!" said Iris quickly. "You have never said anything that a gentleman should not have said."

"And if you yourself found any pleasure in answering my letters——"

"Yes," said Iris with frankness, "it gave me great pleasure to read and to answer your letters, as well as I could."

"I have not brought back your letters. I hope you will allow me to keep them. And, if you will, why should we not continue our correspondence as before?"

But he did not ask the question confidently.

"No," said Iris decidedly; "it can never be continued as before. How could it, when once we have met and you have learned the truth?"

"Then," he continued, "if we cannot write to each other any more, can we not talk?"

She ought to have informed him on the spot that the thing was quite impossible, and not to be thought of for one moment. She should have said, coldly but firmly—every right-minded and well-behaved girl would have said, "Sir, it is not right that you should come alone to a young lady's study. Such things are not to be permitted. If we meet in society, we may, perhaps, renew our acquaintance."

But girls do go on sometimes as if there was no such thing as propriety at all, and such cases are said to be growing more frequent. Besides, Iris was not a girl who was conversant with social *convenances*. She looked at her pupil thoughtfully and frankly.

"Can we?" she asked. She who hesitates is lost—a maxim which cannot be too often read, said, and studied. It is one of the very few golden rules omitted from Solomon's Proverbs. "Can we? It would be pleasant."

"If you will permit me," he blushed and stammered, wondering at her ready acquiescence, "if you will permit me to call upon you sometimes—here, if you will allow me, or anywhere else. You know my name. I am by profession an artist, and I have a studio close at hand, in Tite Street."

"To call upon me here!" she repeated.

Now, when one is a tutor, and has been reading with a pupil for two years, one regards that pupil with a feeling which may not be exactly parental, but which is unconventional. If Arnold had said: "Behold me! May I, being a young man, call upon you, a young woman?" she would have replied: "No, young man, that can never be." But when he said, "May I, your pupil, call sometimes

upon you, my tutor?" a distinction was at once established, by which the impossible became possible.

"Yes," she said, "I think you may call. My grandfather has his tea with me every evening at six. You may call then, if it will give you any pleasure."

"You really will let me come here?"

The young man looked as if the permission was likely to give him the greatest pleasure.

"Yes; if you wish it."

She spoke just exactly like an Oxford Don giving an undergraduate permission to take an occasional walk with him, or to call for conversation and advice at certain times in his rooms. Arnold noticed the manner, and smiled.

"Still," he said, "as your pupil?"

He meant to set her at her ease concerning the propriety of these visits. She thought he meant a continuation of a certain little arrangement as to fees, and blushed.

"No," she said; "I must not consider you as a pupil any longer. You have put an end to that yourself."

"I do not mind, if only I continue your friend."

"Oh," she said, "but we must not pledge ourselves rashly to friendship. Perhaps you will not like me when you once come to know me."

"Then I remain your disciple."

"Oh no," she flushed again, "you must already think me presumptuous enough in venturing to give you advice. I have written so many foolish things——"

"Indeed, no," he interrupted; "a thousand times no. Let me tell you once for all, if I may, that you have taught me a great deal—far more than you can ever understand, or than I can explain. Where did you get your wisdom? Not from the Book of Human Life. Of that you cannot know much as yet."

"The wisdom is in your imagination, I think. You shall not be my pupil, nor my disciple, but—well—because you have told me so much, and I seem to have known you so much, and I seem to have known you so long, and, besides, because you must never feel ashamed of having told me so much, you shall come, if you please, as my brother."

It was not till afterwards that she reflected on the vast responsibilities she incurred in making this proposal, and on the eagerness with which her pupil accepted it.

"As your brother?" he cried, offering her his hand. "Why, it is far—far more than I could have ventured to hope. Yes, I will come as your brother. And now, although you know so much about me, you have told me nothing about yourself—not even your name."

"My name is Iris Aglen."

"Iris! It is a pretty name."

"It was, I believe, my grandmother's. But I never saw her, and I do not know who or what my father's relations are."

"Iris Aglen!" he repeated. "Iris was the Herald of the Gods, and the rainbow was constructed on purpose to serve her for a way from Heaven to the Earth."

"Mathematicians do not allow that," said the girl, smiling.

"I don't know any mathematics. But now I understand in what schools you learned your heraldry. You are Queen-at-Arms, at least, and Herald to the Gods of Olympus."

He wished to add something about the loveliness of Aphrodite, and the wisdom of Athene, but he refrained, which was in good taste.

"Thank you, Mr. Arbuthnot," Iris replied. "I learned my heraldry of my grandfather, who taught himself from the books he sells. And my mathematics I learned of Lala Roy, who is our lodger, and a learned Hindoo gentleman. My father is dead—and my mother as well—and I have no friends in the world except these two old men, who love me, and have done their best to spoil me."

Her eyes grew humid and her voice trembled.

No other friends in the world! Strange to say, this young man felt a little sense of relief. No other friends. He ought to have sympathized with the girl's loneliness; he might have asked her how she could possibly endure life without companionship, but he did not; he only felt that other friends might have been rough and ill-bred; this girl derived her refinement, not only from nature, but also from separation from the other girls who might in the ordinary course have been her friends and associates. And if no other friends, then no lover. Arnold was only going to visit the young lady as her brother; but lovers do not generally approve the introduction of such novel effects as that caused by the appearance of a brand-new and previously unsuspected brother. He was glad, on the whole, that there was no lover.

Then he left her, and went home to his studio, where he sat till midnight, sketching a thousand heads one after the other with rapid pencil. They were all girls' heads, and they all had hair parted on the left side, with a broad, square forehead, full eyes, and straight, clear-cut features.

"No," he said; "it is no good. I cannot catch the curve of her mouth—nobody could. What a pretty girl! And I am to be her brother! What will Clara say? And how—oh, how in the world can she be, all at the same time, so young, so pretty, so learned, so quick, so sympathetic, and so wise?"

IV.

THE WOLF AT HOME.

THERE is a certain music-hall, in a certain street, leading out of a certain road, and this is quite clear and definite enough. Its distinctive characteristics, above any of its fellows, is a vulgarity so profound, that the connoisseur or student in that branch of mental culture thinks that here at last he has reached the lowest depths. For this reason one shrinks from actually naming it, because it might become fashionable, and then, if it fondly tried to change its character to suit its changed audience, it might entirely lose its present charm, and become simply commonplace.

Joe Gallop stood in the doorway of this hall, a few days after the Tempting of Mr. James. It was about ten o'clock, when the entertainments were in full blast. He had a cigarette between his lips, as becomes a young man of fashion; but it had gone out, and he was thinking of something. To judge from the cunning look in his eyes, it was something not immediately connected with the good of his fellow-creatures. Presently the music of the orchestra ceased, and certain female acrobats, who had been "contorting" themselves fearfully and horribly for a quarter of an hour upon the stage, kissed their hands, which were as hard as ropes, from the nature of their profession, and smiled a fond farewell. There was some applause, but not much, because neither man nor woman cares greatly for female acrobats, and the performers themselves are with difficulty persuaded to learn their art, and generally make haste to "go in" again as soon as they can, and try henceforward to forget that they have ever done things with ropes and bars.

Joe, when they left the stage, ceased his meditations, whatever may have been their subject, lit a fresh cigarette, and assumed an air of great expectation, as if something really worth seeing and hearing were now about to appear. And when the Chairman brought down the hammer with the announcement that Miss Carlotta Claradine, the People's Favourite, would now oblige, it was Joe who loudly led the way for a tumultuous burst of applause. Then the band, which at this establishment, and others like unto it, only plays two tunes, one for acrobats, and one for singers, struck up the second air, and the People's Favourite appeared. She may have had by nature a sweet and tuneful voice; perhaps it was in order to please her friends, the People, that she converted it into a harsh and rasping voice, that she delivered her words with even too much gesture, and that she uttered a kind of shriek at the beginning of every verse, which was not in the composer's original music, but was thrown in to compel attention. She was dressed with great simplicity, in plain frock, apron, and white cap, to represent

a fair young Quakeress, and she sang a song about her lover with much "archness"—a delightful quality in woman.

"Splendid, splendid! Bravo!" shouted Joseph at the end of the first verse. "That fetches 'em, don't it, sir? Positively drags 'em in, sir."

He addressed his words, without turning his head, to a man who had just come in, and was gazing at him with unbounded astonishment.

"You here, Joe?" he said.

Joe started.

"Why, Chalker, who'd have thought to meet you in this music-hall?"

"It's a good step, isn't it? And what are you doing, Joe? I heard you'd left the P. & O. Company."

"Had to," said Joe. "A gentleman has no choice but to resign. Ought never to have gone there. There's no position, Chalker—no position at all in the service. That is what I felt. Besides, the uniform, for a man of my style, is unbecoming. And the Captain was a Cad."

"Humph! and what are you doing then? Living on the old man again?"

"Never you mind, David Chalker," replied Joe with dignity; "I am not likely to trouble you any more after the last time I called upon you."

"Well, Joe," said the other, without taking offence, "it is not my business to lend money without security; and all you had to offer was your chance of what your grandfather might leave you—or might not."

"And a very good security, too, if he does justice to his relations."

"Yes; but how did I know whether he was going to do justice? Come, Joe, don't be shirty with an old friend."

There was a cordiality in the solicitor's manner which boded well. Joe was pretty certain that Mr. Chalker was not a man to cultivate friendship unless something was to be got out of it. It is only the idle and careless who can waste time over unprofitable friendships. With most men friendship means assisting in each other's little games, so that every man must become, on occasion, bonnet, confederate, and pal, for his friend, and may expect the same kindly office for himself.

If Chalker wished to keep up his old acquaintance with Joe Gallop, there must be some good reason. Now the only reason which suggested itself to Joe at that moment was that Chalker had lately drawn a new will for the old man, and that he himself might be in it. Here he was wrong. The only reason of Mr. Chalker's friendly attitude was curiosity to know what Joe was doing, and how he was living.

"Look here, Chalker," Joe whispered, "you used to pretend to

be a pal. What's the good of being a pal if you won't help a fellow? You see my grandfather once a week or so; you shut the door and have long talks with him. If you know what he's going to do with his money, why not tell a fellow? Let's make a business matter of it."

"How much do you know, Joe, and what is your business proposal worth?"

"Nothing at all; that's the honest truth—I know nothing. The old man's as tight as wax. But there's other business in the world besides his. Suppose I know of something a precious sight better than his investments, and suppose—just suppose—that I wanted a lawyer to manage it for me."

"Well, Joe?"

"Encore! Bravo! Encore! Bravo!" Joe banged his stick on the floor and shouted because the singer ended her first song. He looked so fierce and big, that all the bystanders made haste to follow his example.

"Splendid, isn't she?" he said.

"Hang the singer! What do you mean by other business?"

"Perhaps it's nothing. Perhaps there will be thousands in it. And perhaps I can get on without you, after all."

"Very well, Joe. Get on without me if you like."

"Look here, Chalker," Joe laid a persuasive hand on the other's arm, "can't we two be friendly? Why don't you give a fellow a lift? All I want to know is where the old man's put his money, and how he's left it."

"Suppose I do know," Mr. Chalker replied, wishing ardently that he did, "do you think I am going to betray trust—a solicitor betray trust—and for nothing? But if you want to talk real business, Joe, come to my office. You know where that is."

Joe knew very well: in fact, there had been more than one difficulty which had been adjusted through Mr. Chalker's not wholly disinterested aid.

Then the singer appeared again, attired in a new and startling dress, and Joe began once more to applaud with voice and stick. Mr. Chalker, surprised at this newly-developed enthusiasm for art, left him and walked up the hall, and sat down beside the Chairman, whom he seemed to know. In fact, the Chairman was also the Proprietor of the show, and Mr. Chalker was acting for him in his professional capacity, much as he had acted for Mr. Emblem.

"Who is your new singer?" he asked.

"She calls herself Miss Carlotta Claradine. She's a woman, let me tell you, Mr. Chalker, who will get along. Fine figure, plenty of cheek, loud voice, flings herself about, and don't mind a bit when the words are a leetle strong. That's the kind of singer the people like. That's her husband, at the far end of the room—the big, good-looking chap with the light moustache and the cigarette in his mouth."

"Whew!" Mr. Chalker whistled the low note which indicates surprise. "That's her husband, is it? The husband of Miss Carlotta Claradine, is it? Oho! oho! Her husband! Are you sure he is her husband?"

"Do you know him, then?"

"Yes, I know him. What's the real name of the girl?"

"Charlotte Smithers. This is her first appearance on any stage—and we made up the name for her when we first put her on the posters. I made it myself—out of Chlorodyne, you know, which is in the advertisements. Sounds well, don't it?—Carlotta Claradine."

"Very well indeed. By Jove! Her husband, is he?"

"And, I suppose," said the Chairman, "lives on his wife's salary. Bless you, Mr. Chalker, there's a whole gang about every theatre and music-hall trying to get hold of the promising girls. It's a regular profession. Them as have nothing but their good looks may do for the mashers, but these chaps look out for the girls who'll bring in the money. What's a pretty face to them compared with the handling of a big salary every week? That's the sort Carlotta's husband belongs to."

"Well, the life will suit him down to the ground."

"And jealous with it, if you please. He comes here every night to applaud, and takes her home himself. Keeps himself sober on purpose."

And then the lady appeared again in a wonderful costume of blue silk and tights, personating the Lion Masher. It was her third and last song.

In the applause which followed, Mr. Chalker could discern plainly the stick as well as the voice of his old friend. And he thought how beautiful is the love of husband unto wife, and he smiled, thinking that when Joe came next to see him, he might perhaps hear truths which he had thought unknown, and, for certain reasons, wished to remain unknown.

Presently he saw the singer pass down the hall, and join her husband, who now, his labours ended, was seeking refreshment at the bar. She was a good-looking girl—still, only a girl, and apparently under twenty—quietly dressed, yet looking anything but quiet. But that might have been due to her fringe, which was, so to speak, a prominent feature in her face. She was tall and well-made, with large features, an ample cheek, a full eye, and a wide mouth. A good-natured-looking girl, and though her mouth was wide, it suggested smiles. The husband was exchanging a little graceful badinage with the barmaid when she joined him, and perhaps this made her look a little cross. "She's jealous, too," said Mr. Chalker, observant; "all the better." Yet a face which, on the whole, was prepossessing and good-natured, and betokened a disposition to make the best of the world.

"How long has she been married?" Mr. Chalker asked the Proprietor.

"Only about a month or so."

"Ah!"

Mr. Chalker proceeded to talk business, and gave no further hint of any interest in the newly-married pair.

"Now, Joe," said the singer, with a freezing glance at the barmaid, "are you going to stand here all night?"

Joe drank off his glass and followed his wife into the street. They walked side by side in silence, until they reached their lodgings. Then she threw off her hat and jacket, and sat down on the horsehair sofa and said abruptly:

"I can't do it, Joe: and I won't. So don't ask me."

"Wait a bit—wait a bit, Lotty, my love. Don't be in a hurry, now. Don't say rash things, there's a good girl." Joe spoke quite softly, as if he were not the least angry, but, perhaps, a little hurt. "There's not a bit of hurry. You needn't decide to-day, nor yet to-morrow."

"I couldn't do it," she said. "Oh, it's a dreadful, wicked thing even to ask me. And only five weeks to-morrow since we married!"

"Lotty, my dear, let us be reasonable." He still spoke quite softly. "If we are not to go on like other people—if we are to be continually bothering our heads about honesty, and that rubbish—we shall be always down in the world. How do other people make money and get on? By humbug, my dear—by humbug. As for you, a little play-acting is nothing."

"But I am not the man's daughter, and my own father's alive and well."

"Look here, Lotty. You are always grumbling about the music-halls."

"Well, and good reason to grumble. If you heard those ballet-girls talk, and see how they go on at the back, you'd grumble. As for the music——" She laughed, as if against her will. "If anybody had told me six months ago—me, that used to go to the Cathedral Service every afternoon—that I should be a Lion Masher at a music-hall, and go on dressed in tights, I should have boxed his ears for impudence."

"Why, you don't mean to tell me, Lotty, that you wish you had stuck to the mouldy old place, and sold music over the counter?"

"Well, then, perhaps I do."

"No, no, Lotty; your husband cannot let you say that."

"My husband can laugh and talk with barmaids. That makes him happy."

"Lotty," he said, "you are a little fool. And think of the Glory! Posters with your name in letters a foot and a half long—'The People's Favourite!' Why, don't they applaud you till their hands drop off?"

She melted a little.

"Applaud! As if that did any good! And me in tights!"

"As for the tights," Joe replied, with dignity, "the only person whom you need consult on that subject is your husband; and since I do not object, I should like to see the man who does. Show me that man, Lotty, and I'll straighten him out for you. You have my perfect approval, my dear. I honour you for the tights."

"My husband's approval!"

She repeated his words again in a manner which had been on other occasions most irritating to him; but to-night he refused to be offended.

"Of course," he went on, "as soon as I get a berth on another ship I shall take you off the boards. It is the husband's greatest delight, especially if he is a jolly sailor, to brave all dangers for his wife. Think, Lotty, how pleasant it would be not to do any more work!"

"I should like to sing sometimes—to sing good music at the great concerts. That's what I thought I was going to do!"

"You shall; you shall sing as little or as often as you like. 'A sailor's wife a sailor's star should be.' You shall be a great lady, Lotty, and you shall just command your own line. Wait a bit, and you shall have your own carriage, and your own beautiful house, and go to as many balls as you like among the countesses and the swells."

"Oh, Joe!" she laughed. "Why, if we were as rich as anything, I should never get ladies to call upon me. And as for you, no one would ever take you to be a gentleman, you know."

"Why, what do you call me, now?"

He laughed, but without much enjoyment. No one likes to be told that he is not a gentleman, whatever his own suspicions on the subject may be.

"Never mind. I know a gentleman when I see one. Go on with your nonsense about being rich."

"I shall make you rich, Lotty, whether you like it or not," he said, still with unwonted sweetness.

She shook her head.

"Not by wickedness," she said stoutly.

"I've got here," he pulled a bundle of papers out of his pocket, "all the documents wanted to complete the case. All I want now is for the rightful heiress to step forward."

"I'm not the rightful heiress, and I'm not the woman to step forward, Joe; so don't you think it."

"I've been to-day," Joe continued, "to Doctor's Commons, and I've seen the will. There's no manner of doubt about it; and the money—oh, Lord, Lotty! if you only knew how much it is!"

"What does it matter, Joe, how much it is, if it is neither yours nor mine?"

"It matters this: that it ought all to be mine."

"How can that be, if it was not left to you?"

Joe was nothing, if not a man of resource; he therefore replied, without hesitation or confusion:

"The money was left to a certain man and to his heirs. That man is dead. His heiress should have succeeded, but she was kept out of her rights. She is dead: and I am her cousin, and entitled to all her property, because she made no will."

"Is that gospel-truth, Joe? Is she dead? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," he replied. "Dead as a door-nail."

"Is that the way you got the papers?"

"That's the way, Lotty."

"Then why not go to a lawyer and make him take up the case for you, and honestly get your own?"

"You don't know law, my dear, or you wouldn't talk nonsense about lawyers. There are two ways. One is to go myself to the present unlawful possessor and claim the whole. It's a woman; she would be certain to refuse, and then we should go to law, and very likely lose it all, although the right is on our side. The other way is for some one—say you—to go to her and say, 'I am that man's daughter. Here are my proofs; here are all his papers. Give me back my own.' That you could do in the interests of justice, though I own it is not the exact truth."

"And if she refuses then?"

"She can't refuse, with the man's daughter actually standing before her. She might make a fuss for a bit, but she would have to give in at last."

"Joe, consider. You have got some papers, whatever they may contain. Suppose that it is all true that you have told me——"

"Lotty, my dear, when did I ever tell you an untruth?"

"When did you ever tell me the truth, my dear? Don't talk wild. Suppose it is all true, how are you going to make out where your heiress has been all this time, and what she has been doing?"

"Trust me for that."

"I trust you for making up something or other, but—oh, Joe, you little think, you clever people, how seldom you succeed in deceiving anyone."

"I've got such a story for you, Lotty, as would deceive anybody. Listen now. It's part truth and part—the other thing. Your father——"

"My father, poor dear man," Lotty interrupted, "is minding his music-shop in Gloucester, and little thinking what wickedness his daughter is being asked to do."

"Hang it! the girl's father, then. He died in America, where he went under another name, and you were picked up by strangers and reared under that name, in complete ignorance of your own family. All that is true and can be proved."

"Who brought her up?"

"People in America. I'm one of 'em."

"Who is to prove that?"

"I am. I am come to England on purpose. I am her guardian."

"Who is to prove that you are the girl's guardian?"

"I shall find somebody to prove that."

His thoughts turned to Mr. Chalker, a gentleman whom he judged capable of proving anything he was paid for.

"And suppose they ask me questions?"

"Answer 'em. You know very little. The papers were only found the other day. You are not expected to know anything."

"Where was the real girl?"

"With her grandfather."

"Where was the grandfather?"

"What does that matter?" he replied; "I will tell you afterwards."

"When did the real girl die?"

"That, too, I will tell you afterwards."

Lotty leaned her cheek upon her hand, and looked at her husband thoughtfully.

"Let us be plain, Joe."

"You can never be plain, my dear," he replied, with the smile of a lover, not a husband; "never in your husband's eyes; not even in tights."

But she was not to be won by flattery.

"Fine words," she said, "fine words. What do they amount to? Oh, Joe, little I thought when you came along with your beautiful promises, what sort of a man I was going to marry."

"A very good sort of a man," he said. "You've got a jolly sailor—an officer and a gentleman. Come now, what have you got to say to this? Can't you be satisfied with an officer and a gentleman?"

He drew himself up to his full height. Well, he was a handsome fellow; there was no denying it.

"Good looks and fine words," his wife went on. "Well, and now I've got to keep you, and if you could make me sing in a dozen halls every night, you would, and spend the money on yourself—joyfully you would."

"We would spend it together, my dear. Don't turn rusty, Lotty."

He was not a bad-tempered man, and this kind of talk did not anger him at all. So long as his wife worked hard and brought in the coin for him to spend, what mattered for a few words now and then? Besides, he wanted her assistance.

"What are you aiming at?" he went on. "I show you a bit of my hand, and you begin talking round and round. Look here, Lotty. Here's a splendid chance for us. I must have a woman's help. I would rather have your help than any other woman's—yes, than any other woman's in the world. I would indeed. If you won't help me, why, then, of course I must go to some other woman."

His wife gasped and choked. She knew already, after only five weeks' experience, how bad a man he was—how unscrupulous, false, and treacherous, how lazy and selfish. But, after a fashion, she

loved him; after a woman's fashion, she was madly jealous of him. Another woman! And only the other night she had seen him giving brandy-and-soda to one of the music-hall ballet-girls. Another woman!

"If you do, Joe," she said; "oh, if you do—I will kill her and you too!"

He laughed.

"If I do, my dear, you don't think I shall be such a fool as to tell you who she is. Do you suppose that no woman has ever fallen in love with me before you? But then, my pretty, you see, I don't talk about them; and do you suppose—oh, Lotty, are you such a fool as to suppose that you are the first girl I ever fell in love with?"

"What do you want me to do? Tell me again"

"I have told you already. I want you to become, for the time, the daughter of the man who died in America; you will claim your inheritance; I will provide you with all the papers; I will stand by you; I will back you up with such a story as will disarm all suspicion. That is all."

"Yes. I understand. Haven't people been sent to prison for less, Joe?"

"Foolish people have. Not people who are well advised and under good management. Mind you, this business is under my direction. I am boss."

She made no reply, but took her candle and went off to bed.

In the dead of night she awakened her husband.

"Joe," she said, "is it true that you know another girl who would do this for you?"

"More than one, Lotty," he replied, this man of resource, although he was only half awake. "More than one. A great many more. Half-a-dozen, I know, at least."

She was silent. Half an hour afterwards she woke him up again.

"Joe," she said, "I've made up my mind. You shan't say that I refused to do for you what any other girl in the world would have done."

As a tempter, it will be seen that Joe was unsurpassed.

It was now a week since he had received, carefully wrapped in wool, and deposited in a wooden-box despatched by Post, a key, newly-made. It was, also, very nearly a week since he had used that key. It was used during Mr. Emblem's hour for tea, while James waited and watched outside in an agony of terror. But Joe did not find what he wanted. There were in the safe one or two ledgers, a banker's book, a cheque-book, and a small quantity of money. But there were not any records at all of moneys invested. There were no railway certificates, waterwork shares, transfers, or notes of stocks, mortgages, loans, or anything at all. The only thing that he saw was a roll of papers tied up with red tape. On the roll was written, "For Iris. To be given to her on her twenty-first birthday."

"What the deuce is this, I wonder?" Joe took this out and looked at it suspiciously. "Can he be going to give her all his money before he dies? Is he going to make her inherit at once?" The thought was so exasperating that he slipped the roll into his pocket. "At all events," he said, "she shan't have them until I have read them first. I dare say they won't be missed for a day or two."

He calculated that he could read and master the contents that night, and put back the papers in the safe in the morning while James was opening the shop.

"There's nothing, James," he whispered as he went out, the safe being locked again. "There is nothing at all. Look here, my lad, you must try another way of finding out where the money is."

"I wish I was sure that he hasn't carried off something in his pocket," James murmured.

Joe spent the whole evening alone, contrary to his usual practice, which was, as we have seen, to spend it at a certain music-hall. He read the papers over and over again.

"I wish," he said at length, "I wish I had known this only two months ago. I wish I had paid more attention to Iris. What a thing it is to have a grandfather who keeps secrets from his grandson! What a game we might have had over this job! What a game we might have still, if——"

And here he stopped, for the first germ or conception of a magnificent coup dawned upon him, and fairly dazzled him so that his eyes saw a bright light and nothing else.

"If Lotty would," he said. "But I am afraid she won't hear of it." He sprang to his feet and caught sight of his own face in the looking-glass over the fireplace. He smiled. "I will try," he said; "I think I know, by this time, how to get round most of 'em. Once they get to feel there are other women in the world, beside themselves, they're pretty easy worked. I will try."

One has only to add to the revelations already made that Joe paid a second visit to the shop, this time early in the morning. The shutters were only just taken down. James was going about with that remarkable watering-pot only used in shops, which has a little stream running out of it, and Mr. Emblem was upstairs slowly shaving and dressing in his bedroom. He walked in, nodded to his friend the Assistant, opened the safe, and put back the roll.

"Now," he murmured, "if the old man has really been such a dunder-headed pump as not to open the packet all these years, what the devil can he know? The name is different; he hasn't got any clue to the will; he hasn't got the certificate of his daughter's marriage, or of the child's baptism—both in the real name. He hasn't got anything. As for the girl here, Iris, having the right Christian name, that's nothing. I suppose there is more than one woman with such a fool of a name as that about in the world."

"Foxy," he said cheerfully, "have you found anything yet about

the investments? Odd, isn't it? Nothing in the safe at all. You can have your key back."

He tossed him the key carelessly and went away.

The question of his grandfather's savings was grown insignificant beside this great and splendid prize which lay waiting for him. What could the savings be? At best a few thousands; the slowly saved thrift of fifty years; nobody new better than Joe himself how much his own profligacies had cost his grandfather; a few thousands, and those settled on his cousin Iris, so that, to get his share, he would have to try every kind of persuasion unless he could get up a case for law. But the other thing—why, it was nearly all personal estate, so far as he could learn by the will, and he had read it over and over again in the room at Somerset House, with the long table in it, and the watchful man who won't let anybody copy anything. What a shame, he thought, not to let wills be copied! Personalty sworn under a hundred and twenty thousand, all in Three Per Cents, and devised to a certain young lady, the testator's ward, in trust, for the testator's son, or his heirs, when he or they should present themselves. Meantime, the ward was to receive for her own use and benefit, year by year, the whole income.

"It is unfortunate," said Joe, "that we can't come down upon her for arrears. Still, there's an income, a steady income, of three thousand six hundred a year when the son's heirs present themselves. I should like to call myself a solicitor, but that kite won't fly, I'm afraid. Lotty must be the sole heiress. Dressed quiet, without any powder, and her fringe brushed flat, she'd pass for a lady anywhere. Perhaps it's lucky, after all, that I married her, though if I had had the good sense to make up to Iris, who's a deuced sight prettier, she'd have kept me going almost as well with her pupils, and set me right with the old man, and handed me over this magnificent haul for a finish. If only the old man hasn't broken the seals and read the papers!"

The old man had not, and Joe's fears were, therefore, groundless.

V.

AS A BROTHER.

ARNOLD immediately began to use the privilege accorded to him with a large and liberal interpretation. If, he argued, a man is to be treated as a brother, there should be the immediate concession of the exchange of Christian names, and he should be allowed to call as often as he pleases. Naturally he began by trying to read the secret of a life self-contained, so dull, and yet so happy, so strange to his experience.

"Is this, Iris," he asked, "all your life? Is there nothing more?"

"No," she said; "I think you have seen all. In the morning I have my correspondence; in the afternoon I do my sewing, I play a

little, I read, or I walk, sometimes by myself, and sometimes with Lala Roy; in the evening I play again, or I read again, or I work at the mathematics, while my grandfather and Lala Roy have their chess. We used to go to the theatre sometimes, but of late my grandfather has not gone. At ten we go to bed. That is all my life."

"But, Iris, have you no friends at all, and no relations? Are there no girls of your own age who come to see you?"

"No, not one; I have a cousin, but he is not a good man at all. His father and mother are in Australia. When he comes here, which is very seldom, my grandfather falls ill only with thinking about him and looking at him. But I have no other relations, because, you see, I do not know who my father's people were."

"Then, Iris," said Arnold, "you may be a countess in your own right; you may have any number of rich people and nice people for your cousins. Do you not sometimes think of that?"

"No," said Iris; "I never think about things impossible."

"If I were you, I should go about the streets and walk round the picture-galleries looking for a face like your own. There cannot be many. Let me draw your face, Iris, and then we will send it to the Grosvenor, and label it, 'Wanted, this young lady's cousins.' You must have cousins, if you could only find them out."

"I suppose I must. But what if they should turn out to be rough and disagreeable people?"

"Your cousins could not be disagreeable, Iris," said Arnold.

She shook her head.

"One thing I should like," she replied. "It would be, to find that my cousins, if I have any, are clever people—astronomers, mathematicians, great philosophers, and writers. But what nonsense it is even to talk of such things; I am quite alone, except for my grandfather and Lala Roy."

"And they are old," murmured Arnold.

"Do not look at me with such pity," said the girl. "I am very happy. I have my own occupation; I am independent; I have my work to fill my mind; and I have these two old gentlemen to care for and think of. They have taken so much care of me that I ought to think of nothing else but their comfort; and then there are all the books downstairs—thousands of beautiful old books always within my reach."

"But you must have some companions, if only to talk and walk with."

"Why, the books are my companions; and then Lala Roy goes for walks with me; and as for talking, I think it is much more pleasant to think."

"Where do you walk?"

"There is Battersea Park; there are the squares; and if you take an omnibus, there are the Gardens and Hyde Park."

"But never alone, Iris?"

"Oh yes, I am often alone. Why not?"

"I suppose," said Arnold, shirking the question, because this is a civilized country, and, in fact, why not? "I suppose that it is your work which keeps you from feeling life dull and monotonous."

"No life," she said, looking as wise as Newton, if Newton was ever young and handsome—"no life can be dull when one is thinking about mathematics all day. Do you study mathematics?"

"No; I was at Oxford, you know."

"Then perhaps you prefer metaphysics? Though Lala Roy says that the true metaphysic, which he has tried to teach me, can only be reached by the Hindoo intellect."

"No, indeed; I have never read any metaphysics whatever. I have only got the English intellect." This he said with intent satirical, but Iris failed to understand it so, and thought it was meant for a commendable humility.

"Physical science, perhaps?"

"No, Iris. Philosophy, mathematics, physics, metaphysics, or science of any kind, have I never learned, except only the science of Heraldry, which you have taught me, with a few other things."

"Oh!" She wondered how a man could exist at all without learning these things. "Not any science at all? How can anyone live without some science?"

"I knew very well," he said, "that as soon as I was found out I should be despised."

"Oh no, not despised. But it seems such a pity——"

"There is another kind of life, Iris, which you do not know. You must let me teach you. It is the life of Art. If you would only condescend to show the least curiosity about me, Iris, I would try to show you something of the Art life."

"How can I show curiosity about you, Arnold? I feel none."

"No: that is just the thing which shames me. I have felt the most lively curiosity about you, and I have asked you thousands of impertinent questions."

"Not impertinent, Arnold. If you want to ask any more, pray do. I dare say you cannot understand my simple life."

"And you ask me nothing at all about myself. It isn't fair, Iris."

"Why should I? I know you already."

"You know nothing at all about me."

"Oh yes, I know you very well indeed; I knew you before you came here. You showed me yourself in your letters. You are exactly like the portrait I drew of you. I never thought, for instance, that you were an old gentleman, as you thought me."

He laughed. It was a new thing to see Iris using, even gently, the dainty weapons of satire.

"But you do not know what I am, or what is my profession, or anything at all about me."

"No: I do not care to know. All that is not part of yourself. It is outside you."

"And because you thought you knew me from those letters, you suffer me to come here and be your disciple still? Yet you gave me back my letters?"

"That was because they were written to me under a wrong impression."

"Will you have them back again?"

She shook her head.

"I know them all by heart," she said simply.

There was not the slightest sign of coquetry or flattery in her voice, or in her eyes, which met his look with clear and steady gaze.

"I cannot ask you to read my portrait to me as you drew it from those pictures."

"Why not?" She began to read him his portrait as readily as if she were stating the conclusion of a problem. "I saw that you were young and full of generous thoughts; sometimes you were indignant with things as they are, but generally you laughed at them and accepted them. It is, it seems, the nature of your friends to laugh a great deal at things which they ought to remedy if they could, not laugh at them. I thought that you wanted some strong stimulus to work; anybody could see that you were a man of kindly nature and good-breeding. You were careful not to offend by anything that you wrote, and I was certain that you were a man of honour. I trusted you, Arnold, before I saw your face, because I knew your soul."

"Trust me still, Iris," he said in rather a husky voice.

"Of course I did not know, and never thought, what sort of a man you were to look at. Yet I ought to have known that you were handsome. I should have guessed that from the very tone of your letters. A hunchback or a cripple could not have written in so light-hearted a strain, and I should have discovered, if I had thought of such a thing, that you were very well satisfied with your personal appearance. Young men should always be that, at least, if only to give them confidence."

"Oh, Iris—oh! Do you really think me conceited?"

"I did not say that. I only said that you were satisfied with yourself. That, I understand now, was clear, from many little natural touches in your letters."

"What else did you learn?"

"Oh, a great deal—much more than I can tell you. I knew that you go into society, and I learned from you what society means; and though you tried to be sarcastic, I understood easily that you liked social pleasure."

"Was I sarcastic?"

"Was it not sarcastic to tell me how the fine ladies, who affect so much enthusiasm for art, go to see the galleries on the private-view day, and are never seen in them again? Was it not sarcastic——"

"Spare me, Iris. I will never do it again. And knowing so much, do you not desire to know more?"

"No, Arnold. I am not interested in anything else."

"But my position, my profession, my people—are you not curious to know them?"

"No. They are not you. They are accidents of yourself."

"Philosopher! But you must know more about me. I told you I was an artist. But you have never inquired whether I was a great artist or a little one."

"You are still a little artist," she said. "I know that, without being told. But perhaps you may become great when you learn to work seriously."

"I have been lazy," he replied, with something like a blush, "but that is all over now. I am going to work. I will give up society. I will take my profession seriously, if only you will encourage me."

Did he mean what he said? When he came away he used at this period to ask himself that question, and was astonished at the length he had gone. With any other girl in the world, he would have been taken at his word, and either encouraged to go on, or snubbed on the spot. But Iris received these advances as if they were a confession of weakness.

"Why do you want me to encourage you?" she asked. "I know nothing about art. Can't you encourage yourself, Arnold?"

"Iris, I must tell you something more about myself. Will you listen for a moment? Well, I am the son of a clergyman who now holds a colonial appointment. I have got the usual number of brothers and sisters, who are doing the usual things. I will not bore you with details about them."

"No," said Iris, "please do not."

"I am the adopted son, or ward, or whatever you please, of a certain cousin. She is a single lady with a great income, which she promises to bequeath to me in the future. In the meantime, I am to have whatever I want. Do you understand the position, Iris?"

"Yes, I think so. It is interesting, because it shows why you will never be a great artist. But it is very sad."

"A man may rise above his conditions, Iris," said Arnold meekly.

"No," she went on: "it is only the poor men who do anything good. Lala Roy says so."

"I will pretend to be poor—indeed, I am poor. I have nothing. If it were not for my cousin, I could not even profess to follow art."

"What a pity," she said, "that you are rich! Lala Roy was rich once."

Arnold repressed an inclination to desire that Lala Roy might be kept out of the conversation.

"But he gave up all his wealth and has been happy, and a Philosopher, ever since."

"I can't give up my wealth, Iris, because I haven't got any—I owe my cousin everything. But for her, I should never even have known you."

He watched her at her work in the morning when she sat patiently answering questions, working out problems, and making papers. She showed him the letters of her pupils, exacting, excusing, petulant—sometimes dissatisfied and even ill-tempered. He watched her in the afternoon while she sewed or read. In the evening he sat with her while the two old men played their game of chess. Regularly every evening at half-past nine the Bengalee checkmated Mr. Emblem. Up to that hour he amused himself with his opponent, formed ingenious combinations, watched openings, and gradually cleared the board until he found himself, as the hour of half-past nine drew near, able to propose a simple problem to his own mind, such as, "White moves first, to mate in three, four, or five moves," and then he proceeded to solve that problem, and checkmated his adversary.

No one, not even Iris, knew how Lala Roy lived, or what he did in the daytime. It was rumoured that he had been seen at Simpson's in the Strand, but this report wanted confirmation. He had lived in Mr. Emblem's second floor for twenty years; he always paid his bills with regularity, and his long spare figure and white moustache and fez were as well known in Chelsea as any red-coated lounger among the old veterans of the Hospital.

"It is quiet for you in the evenings," said Arnold.

"I play to them sometimes. They like to hear me play during the game. Look at them."

She sat down and played. She had a delicate touch, and played soft music, such as soothes, not excites the soul. Arnold watched her, not the old men. How was it that refinement, grace, self-possession, manners, and the culture of a lady, could be found in one who knew no ladies? But then Arnold did not know Lala Roy, nor did he understand the old bookseller.

"You are always wondering about me," she said, talking while she played; "I see it in your eyes. Can you not take me as I am, without thinking why I am different from other girls? Of course I am different, because I know none of them."

"I wish they were all like you," he said.

"No; that would be a great pity. You want girls who understand your own life, and can enter into your pursuits—you want companions who can talk to you. Go back to them, Arnold, as soon as you are tired of coming here."

And yet his instinct was right which told him that the girl was not a coquette. She had no thought—not the least thought—as yet that anything was possible beyond the existing friendship. It was pleasant, but Arnold would get tired of her, and go back to his own people. Then he would remain in her memory as a Study of Character. This she did not exactly formulate, but she had that feeling. Every woman makes a study of character about every man in whom she becomes ever so little interested. But we must not get conceited, my brothers, over this fact. The converse, unhappily,

does not hold true. Very few men ever study the character of a woman at all. Either they fall in love with her before they have had time to make more than a sketch, and do not afterwards pursue the subject, or they do not fall in love with her at all; and in the latter case it hardly seems worth while to follow up a first rough draft.

"Checkmate," said Lala Roy.

The game was finished and the evening over.

"Would you like," he said, another evening, "to see my studio, or do you consider my studio outside myself?"

"I should very much like to see an artist's studio," she replied, with her usual frankness, leaving it an open question whether she would not be equally pleased to see any other studio.

She came, however, accompanied by Lala Roy, who had never been in a studio before, and indeed had never looked at a picture, except with the contemptuous glance which the Philosopher bestows upon the follies of mankind. Yet he came, because Iris asked him. Arnold's studio is one of the smallest of those in Tite Street. Of course it is built of red-brick, and of course it has a noble staircase, and a beautiful painting-room or studio-proper, all set about with bits of tapestry, armour, pictures, and china, besides the tools and properties of the craft. He had portfolios full of sketches; against the wall stood pictures, finished and unfinished; on an easel was a half-painted picture representing a group taken from a modern novel. Most painters only draw scenes from two novels—the Vicar of Wakefield and Don Quixote; but Arnold knew more. The central figure was a girl, quite unfinished—in fact, barely sketched in.

Iris looked at everything with the interest which belongs to the new and unexpected.

Arnold began to show the pictures in the portfolios. There were sketches of peasant-life in Norway and on the Continent; there were landscapes, quaint old houses, and castles; there were ships and ports; and there were heads—hundreds of heads.

"I said you might be a great artist," said Iris. "I am sure now that you will be if you choose."

"Thank you, Iris. It is the greatest compliment you could pay me."

"And what is this?" She was before the easel on which stood the unfinished picture.

"It is a scene from a novel. But I cannot get the principal face; none of the models are half good enough. I want a sweet face—a serious face—a face with deep, beautiful eyes. Iris"—it was a sudden impulse, an inspiration—"let me put your face there. Give me my first commission."

She blushed deeply. All these drawings, the multitudinous faces and heads and figures in the portfolio, were a revelation to her. And just at the very moment when she discovered that

Arnold was one of those who worship beauty—a thing she had never before understood—he told her that her face was so beautiful that he must put it in his picture.

"Oh, Arnold," she said, "my face would be out of place in that picture."

"Would it? Please sit down, and let me make a sketch."

He seized his crayons and began rapidly.

"What do you say, Lala Roy?" he asked, by way of diversion.

"The gifts of the understanding," said the Sage, "are the treasures of the Lord; and He appointeth to every man his portion."

"Thank you," replied Arnold. "Very true and very apt, I'm sure. Iris, please, your face turned just a little. So. Ah! if I can but do some measure of justice to your eyes!"

When Iris went away, there was for the first time the least touch of restraint or self-consciousness in her. Arnold felt it; she showed it in her eyes, and in the touch of her fingers when he took her hand at parting. It was then for the first time, also, that Arnold discovered a truth of overwhelming importance. Every new fact—everything which cannot be disputed or denied is, we all know, of the most enormous importance. He discovered no less a truth than that he was in love with Iris. So important is this truth to a young man, that it reduces the countless myriads of the world to a single pair—himself and another; it converts the most arid waste of streets into an Eden; and it blinds the eyes to ambition, riches, and success. Arnold sat down and reasoned out this truth. He said coldly and "squarely":

"This is a girl whom I have known only a fortnight or so; she lives over a second-hand bookshop; she is a teacher by profession; she knows none of the ways of society; she would doubtless be guilty of all kinds of queer things, if she were suddenly introduced to good people; probably, she would never learn our manners," with more to the same effect, which may be reasonably omitted. Then his Conscience woke up, and said quite simply: "Arnold, you are a liar." Conscience does sometimes call hard names. She is feminine, and therefore privileged to call hard names. Else we should sometimes kick and belabour Conscience. "Arnold, don't tell more lies. You have been gradually learning to know Iris, through the wisest and sweetest letters that were ever written, for a whole year. You gradually began to know her, in fact, when you first began to interlard your letters with conceited revelations about yourself. You knew her to be sympathetic, quick, and of a most kind and tender heart. You are quite sure, though you try to disguise the fact, that she is as honest as the day, and as true as steel. As for her not being a lady, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for even thinking such a thing. Has she not been tenderly brought up by two old men who are full of honour, and truth, and all the simple virtues? Does she not look, move, and speak like the most gracious lady in the land?"—"Like a goddess," Arnold confessed

—"As for the ways and talk of society, what are these worth? and cannot they be acquired? And what are her manners save those of the most perfect refinement and purity?" Thus far Conscience. Then Arnold, or Arnold's secret *advocatus diaboli*, began upon another and quite different line. "She must have schemed at the outset to get me into her net; she is a Siren; she assumes the disguise of innocence and ignorance the better to beguile and to deceive. She has gone home to-day elated because she thinks she has landed a gentleman."

Conscience said nothing: there are some things to which Conscience has no reply in words to offer; yet Conscience pointed to the portrait of the girl, and bade the most unworthy of all lovers look upon even his own poor and meagre representation of her eyes and face, and ask whether such blasphemies could ever be forgiven.

After a self-abasement, which for shame's sake we must pass over, the young man felt happier.

Henry the Second felt much the same satisfaction the morning after his scourging at the hands of the monks, who were as muscular as they were vindictive.

VI.

COUSIN CLARA.

THAT man who spends his days in painting a girl's portrait, in talking to her, and in gazing upon the unfinished portrait when she is not with him, and occupies his thoughts during the watches of the night in thinking about her, is perilously near to taking the last and fatal step. Flight for such a man is the only thing left, and he so seldom thinks of flight until it is too late.

Arnold was at this point.

"I am possessed by this girl," he might have said, had he put his thoughts into words. "I am haunted by her eyes; her voice lingers in my ears; I dream of her face; the touch of her fingers is like the touch of an electric battery." What symptoms are these, so common that one is almost ashamed to write them down, but the infallible symptoms of love? And yet he hesitated, not because he doubted himself any longer, but because he was not independent, and such an engagement might deprive him at one stroke of all that he possessed. Might? It certainly would. Yes; the new and beautiful studio, all the things in it, all his prospects for the future, would have to be given up. "She is worth more than that," said Arnold, "and I should find work somehow. But yet, to plunge her into poverty—and to make Clara the most unhappy of women!"

The reason why Clara would be made the most unhappy of women, was that Clara was his cousin and his benefactor, to whom he owed everything. She was the kindest of patrons, and she liked

nothing so much as the lavishing upon her ward everything that he could desire. But she also, unfortunately, illustrated the truth of Chaucer's teaching, in that she loved power more than anything else, and had already mapped out Arnold's life for him.

It was his custom to call upon her daily, to use her house as his own. When they were separated, they wrote to each other every day; the relations between them were of the most intimate and affectionate kind. He advised in all her affairs, while she directed his; it was understood that he was her heir, and though she was not more than five-and-forty or so, and had, apparently, a long life still before her, so that the succession was distant, the prospect gave him importance. She had been out of town, and perhaps the fact of a new acquaintance with so obscure a person as a simple tutor by correspondence, seemed to Arnold not worth mentioning. At all events, he had not mentioned it in his daily letters.

And now she was coming home; she was actually arrived; he would see her that evening. Her last letter was lying before him.

"I parted from dear Stella yesterday. She goes to stay with the Essex Mainwarings for a month; after that, I hope that she will give me a long visit. I do not know where one could find a sweeter girl, or one more eminently calculated to make a man happy. Beautiful, strictly speaking, she is not, perhaps; but of excellent connections, not without a portion, young, clever, and ambitious. With such a wife, my dear Arnold, a man may aspire to anything."

"To anything," repeated Arnold; "what is her notion of anything? She has arrived by this time." He looked at his watch and found it was past five. "I ought to have been at the station to meet her. I must go round and see her, and I must dine with her to-night." He sighed heavily. "It would be much pleasanter to spend the evening with Iris."

Then a carriage stopped at his door. It was his cousin, and the next minute he was receiving and giving the kiss of welcome. For his own part, he felt guilty, because he could put so little heart into that kiss, compared with all previous embraces. She was a stout, hearty little woman, who could never have been in the least beautiful, even when she was young. Now on the middle line, between forty and fifty, she looked as if her face had been chopped out of the marble by a rude but determined artist, one who knew what he wanted and would tolerate no conventional work. So that her face, at all events, was, if not unique, at least unlike any other face one had ever seen. Most faces, we know, can be reduced to certain general types—even Iris's face might be classified—while of yours, my brother, there are, no doubt, multitudes. Miss Holland, however, had good eyes—bright, clear grey—the eyes of a woman who knows what she wants and means to get it if she can.

"Well, my dear," she said, taking the one comfortable chair in the studio, "I am back again, and I have enjoyed my journey very

much: we will have all the travels this evening. You are looking splendid, Arnold!"

"I am very well indeed. And you, Clara? But I need not ask."

"No, I am always well. I told you about dear Stella, did I not? I never had a more delightful companion."

"So glad you liked her."

"If only, Arnold, you would like her too. But I know"—for Arnold changed colour—"I know one must not interfere in these matters. But surely one may go so far with a young man one loves as to say, 'Here is a girl of a million'? There is not, Arnold, I declare, her equal anywhere; a clearer head I never met, or a better educated girl, or one who knows what a man can do, and how he can be helped to do it."

"Thank you, Clara," Arnold said coldly; "I dare say I shall discover the young lady's perfections in time."

"Not, I think, without some help. She is not an ordinary girl. You must draw her out, my dear boy."

"I will," he said listlessly. "I will try to draw her out, if you like."

"We talked a great deal of you, Arnold," Clara went on. "I confided to her some of my hopes and ambitions for you; and I am free to confess to you that she has greatly modified all my plans and calculations."

"Oh!" Arnold was interested in this. "But, my dear Clara, I have my profession. I must follow my profession."

"Surely—surely! Listen, Arnold, patiently. Anybody can become an artist—anybody, of course, who has the genius. And all kinds of people, gutter people, have the genius."

"The sun," said Arnold, just as if he had been Lala Roy, "shines on all alike."

"Quite so; and there is an immense enthusiasm for Art everywhere; but there is no Art leader. There is no one man recognised as the man most competent to speak on Art of every kind. Think of that. It is Stella's idea entirely. This man, when he is found, will sway enormous authority; he will become, if he has a wife able to assist him, an immense social power."

"And you want me to become that man?"

"Yes, Arnold. I do not see why you should not become that man. Cease to think of becoming President of the Royal Academy, yet go on painting; prove your genius, so as to command respect; cultivate the art of public speaking; and look about for a wife who will be your right hand. Think of this seriously. This is only a rough sketch; we can fill in the details afterwards. But think of it. Oh, my dear boy! if I were only a man, and five-and-twenty, with such a chance before me! What a glorious career is yours, if you choose! But of course you will choose. Good gracious, Arnold! who is that?"

She pointed to the canvas on the easel, where Iris's face was like the tale of Cambuscan, half-told.

"It is no one you know, Clara."

"One of your models?" She rose and examined it more closely through her glasses. "The eyes are wonderful, Arnold. They are eyes I know. As if I could ever forget them! They are the same eyes; exactly the same eyes. I have never met with any like them before. They are the eyes of my poor, lost, betrayed Claude Deseret. Where did you pick up this girl, Arnold? Is she a common model?"

"Not at all. She is not a model. She is a young lady who teaches by correspondence. She is my tutor—of course I have so often talked to you about her—who taught me the science of Heraldry, and wrote me such charming letters."

"Your tutor! You said your tutor was an old gentleman."

"So I thought, Clara. But I was wrong. My tutor is a young lady; and this is her portrait, half-finished. It does not do her any kind of justice."

"A young lady!" She looked suspiciously at Arnold, whose telltale cheek flushed. "A young lady! Indeed! And you have made her acquaintance."

"As you see, Clara; and she does me the honour to let me paint her portrait."

"What is her name, Arnold?"

"She is a Miss Aglen."

"Strange. The Deserets once intermarried with the Aglens. I wonder if she is any connection. They were Warwickshire Aglens. But it is impossible—a teacher by correspondence, a mere private governess! Who are her people?"

"She lives with her grandfather. I think her father was a tutor or journalist of some kind, but he is dead; and her grandfather keeps a second-hand bookshop in the King's Road close by."

"A bookshop! But you said, Arnold, that she was a young lady."

"So she is, Clara," he replied simply.

"Arnold!" For the first time in his life Arnold saw his cousin angry with him. She was constantly being angry with other people, but never before had she been angry with him. "Arnold, spare me this nonsense. If you have been playing with this shop-girl I cannot help it; and I beg that you will tell me no more about it, and do not, to my face, speak of her as a lady."

"I have not been playing with her, I think," said Arnold gravely; "I have been very serious with her."

"Everybody nowadays is a young lady. The girl who gives you a cup of tea in a shop; the girl who dances in the ballet; the girl who makes your dresses."

"In that case, Clara, you need not mind my calling Miss Aglen a young lady."

"There is one word left, at least: women of my class are gentlewomen."

"Miss Aglen is a gentlewoman."

"Arnold, look me in the face. My dear boy, tell me, are you mad? Oh, think of my poor unhappy Claude, what he did, and what he must have suffered!"

"I know what he did. I do not know what he suffered. My case, however, is different from his. I am not engaged to anyone."

"Arnold, think of the great scheme of life I have drawn out for you. My dear boy, would you throw that all away?"

She laid her hands upon his arm and looked in his eyes with a pitiful gaze. He took her hands in his.

"My dear, every man must shape his life for himself, or must live out the life shaped for him by his Fate, not by his friends. What if I see a life more delightful to me than that of which you dream?"

"You talk of a delightful life, Arnold; I spoke of an honourable career."

"Mine will be a life of quiet work and love. Yours, Clara, would be one of noisy and troublesome work without love."

"Without love, Arnold? You are infatuated!"

She sank into the chair, and buried her face in her hands. First, it was her lover who had deserted her for the sake of a governess, the daughter of some London tradesman; and now her adopted son, almost the only creature she loved, for whom she had schemed and thought for nearly twenty years, was ready to give up everything for the sake of another governess, also connected with the lower forms of commercial interests.

"It is very hard, Arnold," she said. "No, don't try to persuade me. I am getting an old woman, and it is too late for me to learn that a gentleman can be happy unless he marries a lady. You might as well ask me to look for happiness with a grocer."

"Not quite," said Arnold.

"It is exactly the same thing. Pray, have you proposed to this—this young lady of the second-hand bookshop?"

"No, I have not."

"You are in love with her, however?"

"I am, Clara."

"And you intend to ask her—in the shop, I dare say, among the second-hand books—to become your wife?"

"That is my serious intention, Clara."

"Claude did the same thing. His father remonstrated with him in vain. He took his wife to London, where, for a time, he lived in misery and self-reproach."

"Do you know that he reproached himself?"

"I know what must have happened when he found out his mistake. Then he went to America, where he died, no doubt in despair, although his father had forgiven him."

"The cases are hardly parallel," said Arnold. "Still, will you permit me to introduce Miss Aglen to you, if she should do me the honour of accepting me? Be generous, Clara. Do not condemn the poor girl without seeing her."

"I condemn no one—I judge no one, not even you, Arnold. But I will not receive that young woman."

"Very well, Clara."

"How shall you live, Arnold?" she asked coldly.

It was the finishing stroke—the dismissal.

"I suppose we shall not marry; but, of course, I am talking as if——"

"As if she was ready to jump into your arms. Go on."

"We shall not marry until I have made some kind of a beginning in my work. Clara, let us have no further explanation. I understand perfectly well. But, my dear Clara," he laid his arm upon her neck and kissed her, "I shall not let you quarrel with me. I owe you too much, and I love you too well. I am always your most faithful of servants."

"No; till you are married—then—— Oh, Arnold! Arnold!"

A less strong-minded woman would have burst into tears. Clara did not. She got into her carriage and drove home. She spent a miserable evening and a sleepless night. But she did not cry.

VII.

ON BATTERSEA TERRACE.

If a woman were to choose any period of her life which she pleased, for indefinite prolongation, she would certainly select that period which lies between the first perception of the first symptoms—when she begins to understand that a man has begun to love her—and the day when he tells her so.

Yet women who look back to this period with so much fondness and regret forget their little tremors and misgivings—the self-distrust, the hopes and fears, the doubts and perplexities, which troubled this time. For although it is acknowledged, and has been taught by all philosophers from King Lemuel and Lao-Kiun downwards, that no greater prize can be gained by any man than the love of a good woman, which is better than a Peerage—better than a Bonanza mine—better than Name and Fame, Kudos and the newspaper paragraph, and is arrived at by much less exertion, being indeed the special gift of the gods to those they love; yet all women perfectly understand the other side to this great truth—namely, that no greater happiness can fall to any woman than the love of a good man. So that, in all the multitudinous and delightful courtships which go on around us, and in our midst, there is, on both sides, both with man and with maid, among those who truly reach to the right under-

standing of what this great thing may mean, a continual distrust of self, with humility and anxiety. And when, as sometimes happens, a girl has been brought up in entire ignorance of love, so that the thought of it has never entered her head, the thing itself, when it falls upon her, is overwhelming, and enfolds her as with a garment from head to foot, and, except to her lover, she becomes as a sealed fountain. I know not how long this season of expectation would have lasted for Iris, but for Arnold's conversation with his cousin, which persuaded him to speak and bring matters to a final issue. To this girl, living as secluded as if she were in an Oriental Harem, who had never thought of love as a thing possible for herself, the consciousness that Arnold loved her was bewildering and astonishing; and she waited, knowing that sooner or later something would be said, but trembling for fear that it should be said.

After all, it was Lala Roy, and not Clara, who finally determined Arnold to wait no longer.

He came every day to the studio with Iris when she sat for her portrait. This was in the afternoon. But he now got into the habit of coming in the morning, and would sit in silence looking on. He came partly because he liked the young man, and partly because the painter's art was new to him, and it amused him to watch a man giving his whole time and intellect to the copying of faces and things in canvas. Also he was well aware by this time that it was not to see Mr. Emblem or himself that Arnold spent every evening at the house, and he was amused to watch the progress of an English courtship. In India, we know, they manage matters differently, and so as to give the bridegroom no more trouble than is necessary. This young man, however, took, he observed, the most wonderful pains and the most extraordinary trouble to please.

"Do you know, Lala Roy," Arnold said one morning, after a silence of three hours or so, "do you know that this is going to be the portrait of the most beautiful woman in the world, and the best?"

"It is well," said the Philosopher, "when a young man desires virtue as well as beauty."

"You have known her all her life. Don't trouble yourself to speak, Lala. You can nod your head if there isn't a maxim ready. You began to lodge in the house twenty years ago, and you have seen her every day since. If she is not the best, as well as the most beautiful girl in the world, you ought to know and can contradict me. But you do know it."

"Happy is the man," said the Sage, "who shall call her wife; happy the children who shall call her mother."

"I suppose, Lala," Arnold went on with an ingenuous blush, "I suppose that you have perceived that—that—in fact—I love her."

The Philosopher inclined his head.

"Do you think—you who know her so well—that she suspects or knows it?"

"The thoughts of a maiden are secret thoughts. As well may

one search for the beginnings of a river as inquire into the mind of a woman. Their ways are not our ways, nor are their thoughts ours, nor have we wit to understand, nor have they tongue to utter, the things they think. I know not whether she suspects."

"Yet you have had experience, Lala Roy?"

A smile stole over the Sage's features.

"In the old days when I was young, I had experience, as all men have. I have had many wives. Yet to me, as to all others, the thoughts of the Harem are unknown."

"Yet, Iris—surely you know the thoughts of Iris, your pupil."

"I know only that her heart is the abode of goodness, and that she knows not any evil thought. Young man, beware. Trouble not the clear fountain."

"Heaven knows," said Arnold, "I would not——" And here he stopped.

"Youth," said the Sage presently, "is the season for love. Enjoy the present happiness. Woman is made to be loved. Receive with gratitude what Heaven gives. The present moment is your own. Defer not until the evening what you may accomplish at noon."

With these words the Oracle became silent, and Arnold sat down and began to think it all over again.

An hour later he presented himself at the house in the King's Road. Iris was alone, and she was playing.

"You, Arnold? It is early for you."

"Forgive me, Iris, for breaking in on your afternoon; but I thought—it is a fine afternoon—I thought that, perhaps—— You have never taken a walk with me."

She blushed, I think in sympathy with Arnold, who looked confused and stammered, and then she said she would go with him.

They left the King's Road by the Royal Avenue, where the leaves were already thin and yellow, and passed through the Hospital and its broad grounds down to the river-side; then they turned to the right, and walked along the Embankment, where are the great new red houses, to Cheyne Walk, and so across the Suspension Bridge. Arnold did not speak one word the whole way. His heart was so full that he could not trust himself to speak. Who would not be four-and-twenty again, even with all the risks and dangers of life before one, the set traps, the gaping holes, and the treacherous quicksands, if it were only to feel once more the overwhelming spirit of the mysterious goddess of the golden cestus! In silence they walked side by side over the bridge. Half-way across, they stopped and looked up the river. The tide was running in with a swift current, and the broad river was nearly at the full; the strong September sun fell upon the water, which was broken into little waves under a fresh breeze meeting the current from the north-west. There were lighters and barges majestically creeping up stream, some with brown three-cornered sails set in the bows and stern, some slowly moving with the tide, their bows kept steady by long

oars, and some lashed one to the other, forming a long train, and pulled along by a noisy little tug, all paddle-wheel and engine. There was a sculler vigorously practising for his next race, and dreaming, perhaps, of sending a challenge to Hanlan; there were some boys in a rowing-boat, laughing and splashing each other; on the north bank there was the garden of the Embankment, with its young trees still green, for the summer lasted into late September this year, and, beyond, the red-brick tower of the old Church, with its flagpost on the top. These details are never so carefully marked as when one is anxious, and fully absorbed in things of great importance. Perhaps Arnold had crossed the bridge a hundred times before, but to-day, for the first time, he noticed the common things of the river. One may be an artist, and yet may miss the treasures that lie at the very feet. This is a remark which occurs to one with each new Academy Show. With every tide the boats go up and down with their brown sails, and always the tower of Chelsea Church rises above the trees, and the broad river never forgets to sparkle and to glow in the sunshine when it gets the chance. Such common things are for the most part unheeded, but, when the mind is anxious and full, they force themselves upon one. Arnold watched boats and river, and sunshine on the sails, with a strange interest and wonder, as one sees visions in a dream. He had seen all these things before, yet now he noticed them for the first time, and all the while he was thinking what he should say to Iris, and how he should approach the subject. I know not whether Iris, like him, saw one thing and noticed another. The thoughts of a maiden, as Lala Roy said, are secret thoughts. She looked upon the river from the bridge with Arnold. When he turned, she turned with him, and neither spoke.

They left the bridge, and passed through the wooden gate at the Battersea end of it, and across the corner where the stone columns lie, like an imitation of Tadmor in the Desert, and so to the broad Terrace overlooking the river.

There is not, anywhere, a more beautiful Terrace than this of Battersea Park, especially when the tide is high. Before it lies the splendid river, with the barges which Arnold had seen from the bridge. They are broad, and flat, and sometimes squat, and sometimes black with coal, and sometimes they go up and down sideways, in lubberly Dutch fashion, but they are always picturesque; and beyond the river is the Embankment, with its young trees, which will before many years be tall and stately trees; and behind the trees are the new red palaces; and above the houses, at this time of the year and day, are the flying clouds, already coloured with the light of the sinking sun. Behind the Terrace are the trees and lawns of the best-kept Park in London.

In the afternoon of a late September day, there are not many who walk in these gardens. Arnold and Iris had the Terrace almost to themselves, save for half-a-dozen girls with children, and two or

three old men making the most of the last summer they were ever likely to see, though it would have been cruel to tell them so.

"This is your favourite walk, Iris," said Arnold at last, breaking the silence.

"Yes; I come here very often. It is my garden. Sometimes in the winter, and when the east wind blows up the river, I have it all to myself."

"A quiet life, Iris," he said, "and a happy life."

"Yes; a happy life."

"Iris, will you change it for a life which will not be so quiet?" He took her hand, but she made no reply. "I must tell you, Iris, because I cannot keep it from you any longer. I love you!—oh, my dear, I cannot tell you how I love you."

"Oh, Arnold!" she whispered. It had come—the thing she feared to hear!

"May I go on? I have told you now the most important thing, and the rest matters little. Oh, Iris, may I go on and tell you all?"

"Go on," she said; "tell me all."

"As for telling you everything," he said, with a little laugh, "that is no new thing. I have told you all that is in my mind for a year and more. It seems natural that I should tell you this too, even if it did not concern you at all, but some other girl; though that would be impossible. I love you, Iris; I love you—I should like to say nothing more. But I must tell you as well that I am quite a poor man; I am an absolute pauper; I have nothing at all—no money, no work, nothing. My studio and all must go back to her; and yet, Iris, in spite of this, I am so selfish as to tell you that I love you. I would give you, if I could, the most delightful palace in the world, and I offer you a share in the uncertain life of an artist, who does not know whether he has any genius, or whether he is fit even to be called an artist."

She gave him her hand with the frankness which was her chief charm, and with a look in her eyes so full of trust and truth that his heart sank within him for very fear lest he should prove unworthy of so much confidence.

"Oh, Arnold," she said, "I think that I have loved you all along, ever since you began to write to me. And yet I never thought that love would come to me."

He led her into that bosky grove set with seats convenient for lovers, which lies romantically close to the Italian Restaurant, where they sell the cocoa and the ginger-beer. There was no one in the place beside themselves, and here, among the falling leaves, and in a solitude as profound as on the top of a Dartmoor Tor, Arnold told the story of his love again, and with greater coherence, and even more extravagance.

"Oh," said Iris again, "how could you love me, Arnold—how could you love any girl so? It is a shame, Arnold; we are not worth so much. Could any woman," she thought, "be worth the

wealth of passion and devotion which her lover poured out for her?"

"My tutor," he went on, "if you only knew what things you have taught me, a man of experience! If I admired you when I thought you must be a man, and pictured an old scholar full of books and wisdom, what could I do when I found that a young girl had written those letters? You gave mine back to me: did you think that I would ever part with yours? And you owned—oh, Iris, what would not the finished woman of the world give to have the secret of your power?—you owned that you knew all my letters, every one, by heart. And after all, you will love me, your disciple and pupil, and a man who has his way to make from the very beginning and first round of the ladder. Think, Iris, first. Is it right to throw away so much upon a man who is worth so little?"

"But I am glad that you are poor. If you were rich, I should have been afraid—oh, not of you, Arnold—never of you, but of your people. And, besides, it is so good—oh, so very good—for a young man—a young man of the best kind, not my cousin's kind—to be poor. Nobody ought ever to be allowed to become rich before he is fifty years of age at the very least; because now you will have to work in earnest, and you will become a great artist—yes, a truly great artist, and we shall be proud of you."

"You shall make of me what you please, and what you can. For your sake, Iris, I wish I were another Raphael. You are my mistress and my queen. Bid me to die, and I will dare—Iris, I swear that the words of the extravagant old song are real to me."

"Nay," she said, "not your Queen, but your servant always. Surely love cannot command. But, I think," she added softly, with a tender blush—"I think—nay, I am sure and certain that it can obey."

He stooped and kissed her fingers.

"My love!" he murmured; "my love—my love!"

The shadows lengthened, and the evening fell; but those two foolish people sat side by side, and hand in hand, and what they said further we need not write down, because to tell too much of what young lovers whisper to each other is a kind of sacrilege.

At last Arnold became aware that the sun was actually set, and he sprang to his feet.

They walked home again across the Suspension Bridge. In the western sky was hanging a huge bank of cloud all bathed in purple, red, and gold; the river was ablaze; the barges floated in a golden haze; the light shone on their faces, and made them all glorious, like the face of Moses, for they, too, had stood—nay, they were still standing—at the very gates of Heaven.

"See, Iris," said the happy lover, "the day is done; your old life is finished; it has been a happy time, and it sets in glory and splendour. The red light in the west is a happy omen of the day to come."

So he took her by the hand and led her over the river, and then to his own studio in Tite Street. There, in the solemn twilight, he held her in his arms, and renewed the vows of love with kisses and fond caresses.

"Iris, my dear—my dear—you are mine and I am yours. What have I done to deserve this happy fate?"

VIII.

THE DISCOVERY.

At nine o'clock that evening Mr. Emblem looked up from the chess-board.

"Where is Mr. Arbuthnot this evening, my dear?" he asked.

It would be significant in some houses when a young man is expected every evening. Iris blushed, and said that perhaps he was not coming. But he was, and his step was on the stair as she spoke.

"You are late, Mr. Arbuthnot," said Mr. Emblem reproachfully; "you are late, sir, and somehow we get no music now until you come. Play us something, Iris. It is my move, Lala——"

Iris opened the piano, and Arnold sat down beside her, and their eyes met. There was in each the consciousness of what had passed.

"I shall speak to him to-night, Iris," Arnold whispered. "I have already written to my cousin. Do not be hurt if she does not call upon you."

"Nothing of that sort will hurt me," Iris said, being ignorant of social ways, and without the least ambition to rise in the world. "If your cousin does not call upon me, I shall not be disappointed. Why should she want to know me? But I am sorry, Arnold, that she is angry with you."

Lala Roy just then found himself in presence of a most beautiful problem—white to move and checkmate in three moves. Mr. Emblem found the meshes of fate closing round him earlier than usual, and both bent their heads closely over the table.

"Checkmate!" said Lala Roy. "My friend, you have played badly this evening."

"I have played badly," Mr. Emblem replied, "because to-morrow will be an important day for Iris, and for myself—a day, Iris, that I have been looking forward to for eighteen years, ever since I got your father's last letter, written upon his death-bed. It seems a long time, but, like a lifetime," said the old man of seventy-five, "it is as nothing when it is gone. Eighteen years—and you were a little thing of three, child!"

"What is going to happen to me, grandfather, except that I shall be twenty-one?"

"We shall see to-morrow. Patience, my dear—patience!"

He spread out his hands and laughed. What was going to happen to himself was a small thing compared with the restoration of Iris to her own.

"Mr. Emblem," said Arnold, "I also have something of importance to say."

"You, too, Mr. Arbuthnot? Cannot yours wait also until to-morrow?"

"No; it is too important. It cannot wait an hour."

"Well, sir"—Mr. Emblem pushed up his spectacles and leaned back in his chair—"well, Mr. Arbuthnot, let us have it."

"I think you may guess what I have to say, Mr. Emblem. I am sure that Lala Roy has already guessed it."

The Philosopher inclined his head in assent.

"It is that I have this afternoon asked Iris to marry me, Mr. Emblem; and she has consented."

"Have you consented, Iris, my dear?" said her grandfather.

She placed her hand in Arnold's for reply.

"Do you think you know him well enough, my dear?" Mr. Emblem asked gravely, looking at her lover. "Marriage is a serious thing; it is a partnership for life. Children, think well before you venture on the happiness or ruin of your whole lives. And you are so young. What a pity—what a thousand pities—that people were not ordained to marry at seventy or so!"

"We have thought well," said Arnold. "Iris has faith in me."

"Then, young man, I have nothing to say. Iris will marry to please herself; and I pray that she may be happy. As for you, I like your face and your manners; but I do not know who you are, nor what your means may be. Remember that I am poor; I am so poor—I can tell you all now—that to-morrow we shall—well, patience—to-morrow I shall most likely have my very stock seized and sold."

"Your stock sold? Oh, grandfather!" cried Iris; "and you did not tell me! And I have been so happy!"

"Friend," said Lala, "was it well to hide this from me?"

"Foolish people," Mr. Emblem went on, "have spread reports that I am rich, and have saved money for Iris. It is not true, Mr. Arbuthnot. I am not rich. Iris will come to you empty-handed."

"And as for me, I have nothing," said Arnold, "except a pair of hands and all the time there is. So we have all to gain and nothing to lose."

"You have your profession," said Iris, "and I have mine. Grandfather, do not fear, even though we shall all four become poor together."

It seemed natural to include Lala Roy, who had been included with them for twenty years.

"As for Iris being empty-handed," said Arnold, "how can that

ever be? Why, she carries in her hands an inexhaustible cornucopia, full of precious things."

"My dear," said the old man, holding out his arms to her, "I could not keep you always. Some day I knew you would leave me; it is well that you should leave me when I am no longer able to keep a roof over your head."

"But we shall find a roof for you, grandfather, somewhere. We shall never part."

"The best of girls always," said Mr. Emblem; "the best of girls. Mr. Arbuthnot, you are a happy man."

Then the Sage lifted up his voice and said solemnly:

"On her tongue dwelleth music; the sweetness of honey floweth from her lips; humility is like a crown of glory about her head; her eye speaketh softness and love; her husband putteth his heart in her bosom and findeth joy."

"Oh, you are all too good to me," murmured Iris.

"A friend of mine," said Mr. Emblem, "now, like nearly all my friends, beneath the sod, used to say that a good marriage was a happy blending of the finest Wallsend with the most delicate Silkstone. But he was in the coal trade. For my own part, I have always thought that it is like the binding of two scarce volumes into one."

"Oh, not second-hand volumes, grandfather!" said Iris.

"I don't know. Certainly not new ones. Not volumes under one-and-twenty, if you please. Mr. Arbuthnot, I am glad; you will know why very soon. I am very glad that Iris made her choice before her twenty-first birthday. Whatever may happen now, no one can say that either of you were influenced by any expectations. You both think yourselves paupers; well, I say nothing, because I know nothing. But, children, if a great thing happen to you, and that before four-and-twenty hours have passed, be prepared—be prepared, I say—to receive it with moderate rejoicing."

"To-morrow?" Iris asked. "Why to-morrow? Why not to-night, if you have a secret to tell us?"

"Your father enjoined in his last letter to wait till you were twenty-one. The eve of your birthday, however, is the same thing as your birthday. We will open the papers to-night. What I have to tell you, Iris, shall be told in the presence of your lover, whatever it is—good or bad."

He led the way downstairs into the back-shop. Here he lit the gas, and began to open his case, slowly and cautiously.

"Eighteen years ago, Iris, my child, I received your father's last letter, written on his death-bed. This I have already told you. He set down, in that letter, several things which surprised me very much. We shall come to these things presently. He also laid down certain instructions for your bringing up, my dear. I was, first of all, to give you as good an education as I could afford; I was to keep you as much as possible separated from companions who might

not be thought afterwards fit to be the friends of a young lady. You have had as good an education as Lala Roy and I could devise between us. From him you have learned mathematics, so as to steady your mind and make you exact; and you have learned the science of Heraldry from me, so that you may at once step into your own place in the polite world, where, no doubt, it is a familiar and a necessary study. You have also learned music, because that is an accomplishment which everyone should possess. What more can any girl want for any station? My dear, I am happy to think that a gentleman is your lover. Let him tell us, now—Lala Roy and me—to our very faces, if he thinks we have, between us, made you a lady."

Arnold stooped and kissed her hand.

"There is no more perfect lady," he said, "in all the land."

"Iris's father, Mr. Arbuthnot, was a gentleman of honourable and ancient family, and I will tell you, presently, as soon as I find it out myself, his real name. As for his coat-of-arms, he bore Quarterly, first and fourth, two roses and a boar's head erect; second and third, gules and fesse between—strange, now, that I have forgotten what it was between. Everybody calls himself a gentleman nowadays; even Mr. Chalker, who is going to sell me up, I suppose; but everybody, if you please, is not armiger. Iris, your father was armiger. I suppose I am a gentleman on Sundays, when I go to church with Iris, and wear a black coat. But your father, my dear, though he married my daughter, was a gentleman by birth. And one who knows Heraldry respects a gentleman by birth." He laid his hand now on the handle of the safe, as if the time were nearly come for opening it, but not quite. "He sent me, with this last letter, a small parcel for you, my dear, not to be opened until you reached the age of twenty-one. As for the person who had succeeded to his inheritance, she was to be left in peaceable possession for a reason which he gave—quite a romantic story, which I will tell you presently—until you came of age. He was very urgent on this point. If, however, any disaster of sickness or misfortune fell upon me, I was to act in your interests at once, without waiting for time. Children," the old man added solemnly, "by the blessing of Heaven—I cannot take it as anything less—I have been spared in health and fortune until this day. Now let me depart in peace, for my trust is expired, and my child is safe, her inheritance secured, with a younger and a better protector." He placed the key in the door of the safe. "I do not know, mind," he said, still hesitating to take the final step—"I do not know the nature of the inheritance; it may be little or may be great. The letter does not inform me on this point. I do not even know the name of the testator, my son-in-law's father. Nor do I know the name of my daughter's husband. I do not even know your true name, Iris, my child. But it is not Aglen."

"Then, have I been going under a false name all my life?"

"It was the name your father chose to bear for reasons which seemed good and sufficient to him, and these are part of the story which I shall have to tell you. Will you have this story first, or shall we first open the safe and read the contents of the parcel?"

"First," said Arnold, "let us sit down and look in each other's faces."

It was a practical suggestion, But, as it proved, it was an unlucky one, because it deprived them of the story.

"Iris," he said, while they waited, "this is truly wonderful!"

"Oh, Arnold! What am I to do with an inheritance?"

"That depends on what it is. Perhaps it is a landed estate; in which case we shall not be much better off, and can go on with our work; perhaps there will be houses; perhaps it will be thousands of pounds, and perhaps hundreds. Shall we build a castle in the air to suit our inheritance?"

"Yes; let us pretend. Oh, grandfather, stop one moment! Our castle, Arnold, shall be, first of all, the most beautiful studio in the world for you. You shall have tapestry, blue china, armour, lovely glass, soft carpets, carved doors and painted panels, a tall mantelshelf, old wooden cabinets, silver cups, and everything else that you ought to like, and you shall choose everything for yourself, and never get tired of it. But you must go on painting; you must never stop working, because we must be proud of you as well. Oh, but I have not done yet. My grandfather is to have two rooms for himself, which he can fill with the books he will spend his time in collecting; Lala Roy will have two more rooms, quite separate, where he can sit by himself whenever he does not choose to sit with me; I shall have my own study to myself, where I shall go on reading mathematics; and we shall all have, between us, the most beautiful dining-room and drawing-room that you ever saw; and a garden and a fountain; and—yes—money to give to people who are not so fortunate as ourselves. Will that do, Arnold?"

"Yes, but you have almost forgotten yourself, dear. There must be carriages for you, and jewels, and dainty things all your own, and a boudoir, and nobody shall think of doing or saying anything in the house at all, except for your pleasure; will that do, Iris?"

"I suppose we shall have to give parties of some kind, and to go to them. Perhaps one may get to like society. You will teach me lawn-tennis, Arnold; and I should like, I think, to learn dancing. I suppose I must leave off making my own dresses, though I know that I shall never be so well dressed if I do. And about the cakes and puddings—but, oh, there is enough pretending."

"It is difficult," said Lala Roy, "to bear adversity. But to be temperate in prosperity is the height of wisdom."

"And now suppose, Iris," said Arnold, "that the inheritance, instead of being thousands a year, is only a few hundreds."

"Ah, then, Arnold, it will be ever so much simpler. We shall have something to live upon until you begin to make money for us all."

"Yes: that is very simple. But suppose, again, that the inheritance is nothing but a small sum of money."

"Why, then," said Iris, "we will give it all to grandfather, who will pay off his creditor, and we will go on as if nothing had happened."

"Child!" said Mr. Emblem, "do you think that I would take your little all?"

"And suppose, again," Arnold went on, "that the inheritance turns out a delusion, and that there is nothing at all."

"That cannot be supposed," said Mr. Emblem quickly; "that is absurd!"

"If it were," said Iris, "we shall only be, to-morrow, just exactly what we are to-day. I am a teacher by correspondence, with five pupils. Arnold is looking for art-work which will pay; and between us, my dear grandfather and Lala Roy, we are going to see that you want nothing."

Always Lala Roy with her grandfather, as if their interests were identical, and, indeed, he had lived so long with them that Iris could not separate the two old men.

"We will all live together," Iris continued, "and when our fortune is made we will all live in a palace. And now, grandfather, that we have relieved our feelings, shall we have the story and the opening of the papers in the safe?"

"Which will you have first?" Mr. Emblem asked again.

"Oh, the safe," said Arnold. "The story can wait. Let us examine the contents of the safe."

"The story," said Mr. Emblem, "is nearly all told in your father's letter, my dear. But there is a little that I would tell you first, before I read that letter. You know, Iris, that I have never been rich: my shop has kept me up till now, but I have never been able to put by money. Well—my daughter Alice, your poor mother, my dear, who was as good and clever as you are, was determined to earn her own living, and so she went out as a governess. And one day she came home with her husband; she had been married the day before, and she told me that they had very little money, and her husband was a scholar and a gentleman, and wanted to get work by writing. He got some, but not enough, and they were always in a poor way, until one day he got a letter from America—it was while the Civil War was raging—from an old Oxford friend, inviting him to emigrate and try his fortune as a journalist out there. He went, and his wife was to join him. But she died, my dear; your mother died, and a year later I had your father's last letter, which I am now going to read to you."

"One moment, sir," said Arnold. "Before you open the safe and take out the papers, remember that Iris and I can take nothing—nothing at all for ourselves until all your troubles are tided over."

"Children—children!" cried Mr. Emblem.

"Go, my son, to the Desert," observed the Sage, standing solemnly upright like a Prophet of Israel. "Observe the young stork of the wilderness, how he beareth on his wings his aged sire and supplieth him with food. The piety of a child is sweeter than the incense of Persia offered to the sun; yea, more delicious is it than the odours from a field of Arabian spice."

"Thank you, Lala," said Mr. Emblem. "And now, children, we will discover the mystery."

He unlocked the safe, and threw it open with somewhat of a theatrical air. "The roll of papers." He took it out. "'For Iris, to be opened on her twenty-first birthday.' And this is the eve of it. But where is the letter? I tied the letter round it, with a piece of tape. Very strange. I am sure I tied the letter with a piece of tape. Perhaps it was—— Where is the letter?"

He peered about in the safe; there was nothing else in it except a few old account-books; but he could not find the letter! Where could it be?

"I remember," he said—"most distinctly I remember tying up the letter with the parcel. Where can it be gone to?"

A feeling of trouble to come seized him. He was perfectly sure he had tied up the letter with the parcel, and here was the parcel without the letter, and no one had opened the safe except himself.

"Never mind about the letter, grandfather," said Iris; "we shall find that afterwards."

"Well, then, let us open the parcel."

It was a packet about the size of a crown-octavo volume, in brown paper, carefully fastened up with gum, and on the face of it was a white label inscribed, "For Iris, to be opened on her twenty-first birthday." Everybody in turn took it, weighed it, so to speak, looked at it curiously, and read the legend. Then they returned it to Mr. Emblem, who laid it before him and produced a penknife. With this, as carefully and solemnly as if he were offering up a sacrifice or performing a religious function, he cut the parcel straight through.

"After eighteen years," he said; "after eighteen years. The ink will be faded and the papers yellow. But we shall see the certificates of the marriage and of your baptism, Iris; there will also be letters to different people, and a true account of the rupture with his father, and the cause, of which his letter spoke. And of course we shall find out what was his real name and what is the kind of inheritance which has been waiting for you so long, my dear. Now then."

The covering in case of the packet was a kind of stiff cardboard or millboard, within brown paper. Mr. Emblem laid it open. It

was full of folded papers. He took up the first and opened it. The paper was blank. The next, it was blank; the third, it was blank; the fourth, and fifth, and sixth, and so on throughout. The case, which had been waiting so long, waiting for eighteen years, to be opened on Iris's twenty-first birthday, was full of blank papers. They were all half-sheets of note-paper.

Mr. Emblem looked surprised at the first two or three papers; then he turned pale: then he rushed at the rest. When he had opened all, he stared about him with bewilderment.

"Where is the letter?" he asked again. Then he began with trembling hands to tear out the contents of the safe and spread them upon the table. The letter was nowhere.

"I am certain," he said, for the tenth time, "I am quite certain that I tied up the letter with red tape, outside the packet. And no one has been at the safe except me."

"Tell us," said Arnold, "the contents of the letter as well as you remember them. Your son-in-law was known to you under the name of Aglen, which was not his real name. Did he tell you his real name?"

"No."

"What did he tell you? Do you remember the letter?"

"I remember every word of the letter."

"If you dictate it, I will write it down. That may be a help."

Mr. Emblem began quickly, and as if he was afraid of forgetting:

"'When you read these lines, I shall be in the Silent Land, whither Alice, my wife, has gone before me."

Then Mr. Emblem began to stammer.

"'In one small thing we deceived you, Alice and I. My name is not Aglen'—is not Aglen——"

And here a strange thing happened. His memory failed him at this point.

"Take time," said Arnold; "there is no hurry."

Mr. Emblem shook his head.

"I shall remember the rest to-morrow, perhaps," he said.

"Is there anything else you have to help us?" asked Arnold; "never mind the letter, Mr. Emblem. No doubt that will come back presently. You see we want to find out, first, who Iris's father really was, and what is her real name. There was his coat-of-arms. That will connect her with some family, though it may be a family with many branches."

"Yes—oh yes! his coat-of-arms. I have seen his signet-ring a dozen times. Yes, his coat; yes, first and fourth, two roses and a boar's head erect; second and third—I forget."

"Humph! Was there anyone who knew him before he was married?"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Emblem sat up eagerly. "Yes, there is—there is; he is my oldest customer. But I forget his name. I have for-

gotten everything. Perhaps I shall get back my memory to-morrow. But I am old. Perhaps it will never get back."

He leaned his head upon his hands, and stared about him with bewildered eyes.

"I do not know, young man," he said presently, addressing Arnold, "who you are. If you come from Mr. Chalker, let me tell you it is a day too soon. To-morrow we will speak of business." Then he sprang to his feet suddenly, struck with a thought which pierced him like a dagger. "To-morrow! It is the day when they will come to sell me up. Oh, Iris! what did that matter when you were safe? Now we are all paupers together—all paupers."

He fell back in his chair white and trembling. Iris soothed him; kissed his cheek and pressed his hand; but the terror and despair of bankruptcy were upon him. This is an awful spectre, which is ever ready to appear before the man who has embarked his all in one venture. A disastrous season, two or three unlucky ventures, a succession of bad debts, and the grisly spectre stands before them. He had no terror for the old man so long as he thought that Iris was safe. But now——

"Idle talk, Iris—idle talk, child," he said, when they tried to comfort him. "How can a girl make money by teaching? Idle talk, young man. How can money be made by painting? It's as bad a trade as writing. How can money be made anyhow but in an honest shop? And to-morrow I shall have no shop, and we shall all go into the street together!"

Presently, when lamentations had yielded to despair, they persuaded him to go to bed. It was past midnight. Iris went upstairs with him, while Lala Roy and Arnold waited down below. And then Arnold made a great discovery. He began to examine the folded papers which were in the packet. I think he had some kind of vague idea that they might contain secret and invisible writing. They were all sheets of note-paper of the same size, folded in the same way—namely, doubled as if for a square envelope. On holding one to the light, he read the water-mark:

HIEROGLYPHICA
A Vegetable Vellum
M. S. and Co.

They all had the same water-mark. He showed the thing to the Hindoo, who did not understand what it meant.

Then Iris came down again. Her grandfather was sleeping. Like a child, he fell asleep the moment his head fell upon the pillow.

"Iris," he said, "this is no delusion of your grandfather's. The parcel has been robbed."

"How do you know, Arnold?"

"The stupid fellow who stole and opened the packet no doubt thought he was wonderfully clever to fill it up again with paper. But he forgot that the packet has been lying for eighteen years in

the safe, and that this note-paper was made the day before yesterday."

"How do you know that?"

"You can tell by the look and feel of the paper; they did not make paper like this twenty years ago; besides, look at the water-mark;" he held it to the light, and Iris read the mystic words. "That is the fashion of to-day. One House issues a new kind of paper, with a fancy name, and another imitates them. To-morrow I will ascertain exactly when this paper was made."

"But who would steal it, Arnold? Who could steal it?"

"It would not probably be of the least use to anyone. But it might be stolen in order to sell it back. We may see an advertisement carefully worded, guarded, or perhaps—— Iris, who had access to the place when your grandfather was out?"

"No one but James, the shopman. He has been here five-and-twenty years. He would not, surely, rob his old master. No one else comes here except the customers and Cousin Joe."

"Joe is not, I believe, quite——"

"Joe is a very bad man. He has done dreadful things. But then, even if Joe were bad enough to rob the safe, how could he get at it? My grandfather never leaves it unlocked. Oh, Arnold, Arnold! that all this trouble should fall upon us on the very day——"

"My dear, is it not better that it should fall upon you when I am here, one more added to your advisers? If you have lost a fortune, I have found one. Think that you have given it to me."

"Oh, the fortune may go," she said. "The future is ours, and we are young. But who shall console my grandfather in his old age for his bankruptcy?"

"As the stream," said Lala Roy, "which passeth from the mountains to the ocean, kisseth every meadow on its way, yet tarries not in any place, so Fortune visits the sons of men; she is unstable as the wind: who shall hold her? Let not adversity tear off the wings of hope."

They could do nothing more. Arnold replaced the paper in the packet, and gave it to Iris: they put back the ledgers and account-books in the safe, and locked it up, and then they went upstairs.

"You shall go to bed, Iris," said Arnold, "and you, too, Lala Roy. I shall stay here, in case Mr. Emblem should—should want anything."

He was, in reality, afraid that "something would happen" to the old man. His sudden loss of memory, his loss of self-control when he spoke of his bankruptcy, the confusion of his words, told clearly of a mind unhinged. He could not go away and leave Iris with no better protection than one other weak old man.

He remained, but Iris sat with him, and in the silent watches of the night they talked about the future.

Under every roof are those who talk about the future, and those who think about the past; so the shadow of death is always with

us and the sunshine of life. Not without reason is the Roman Catholic Altar incomplete without a bone of some dead man. As for the thing which had been stolen, that affected them but little. What does it matter—the loss of what was promised but five minutes since?

It was one o'clock in the morning when Lala Roy left them. They sat at the window, hand-in-hand, and talked. The street below them was very quiet; now and then a late cab broke the silence, or the tramp of a policeman; but there were no other sounds. They sat in darkness, because they wanted no light. The hours sped too swiftly for them. At five the day began to dawn.

"Iris," said Arnold, "leave me now, and try to sleep a little. Shall we ever forget this night of sweet and tender talk?"

When she was gone, he began to be aware of footsteps overhead in the old man's room. What was he going to do? Arnold waited at the door. Presently the door opened, and he heard careful steps upon the stars. They were the steps of Mr. Emblem himself. He was fully dressed, with his usual care and neatness, his black silk stock buckled behind, and his white hair brushed.

"Ah, Mr. Arbuthnot," he said cheerfully, "you are early this morning!" as if it was quite a usual thing for his friends to look in at six in the morning.

"You are going down to the shop, Mr. Emblem?"

"Yes, certainly—to the shop. Pray come with me."

Arnold followed him.

"I have just remembered," said the old man, "that last night we did not look on the floor. I will have one more search for the letter, and then, if I cannot find it, I will write it all out—every word. There is not much, to be sure, but the story is told without the names."

"Tell me the story, Mr. Emblem, while you remember it."

"All in good time, young man. Youth is impatient."

He drew up the blind and let in the morning light; then he began his search for the letter on the floor, going on his hands and knees, and peering under the table and chairs with a candle. At length he desisted.

"I tied it up," he said, "with the parcel, with red tape. Very well—we must do without it. Now, Mr. Arbuthnot, my plan is this. First, I will dictate the letter. This will give you the outlines of the story. Next, I will send you to—to my old customer, who can tell you my son-in-law's real name. And then I will describe his coat-of-arms. My memory was never so clear and good as I feel it to-day. Strange, that last night I seemed, for the moment, to forget everything! Ha, ha! Ridiculous, wasn't it? I suppose—— But there is no accounting for these queer things. Perhaps I was disappointed to find nothing in the packet. Do you think, Mr. Arbuthnot, that I——" Here he began to tremble. "Do you

think that I dreamed it all? Old men think strange things. Perhaps——"

"Let us try to remember the letter, Mr. Emblem."

"Yes, yes—certainly—the letter. Why, it went—ahem!—as follows——"

Arnold laid down the pen in despair. The poor old man was mad. He had poured out the wildest farrago, without sense, coherence, or story.

"So much for the letter, Mr. Arbuthnot." He was mad, without doubt, yet he knew Arnold, and knew, too, why he was in the house. "Ah, I knew it would come back to me. Strange if it did not. Why, I read that letter once every quarter or so for eighteen years. It is a part of myself. I could not forget it."

"And the name of your son-in-law's old friend?"

"Oh yes! the name!"

He gave some name, which might have been the lost name; but as Mr. Emblem changed it the next moment, and forgot it again the moment after, it was doubtful—certainly not much to build upon.

"And the coat-of-arms?"

"We are getting on famously, are we not? The coat, sir, was as follows."

He proceeded to describe an impossible coat—a coat which might have been drawn by a man absolutely ignorant of science.

All this took a couple of hours. It was now eight o'clock.

"Thank you, Mr. Emblem," said Arnold. "I have no doubt now that we shall somehow bring Iris to her own again, in spite of your loss. Shall we go upstairs and have some breakfast?"

"It is all right, Iris!" cried the old man gleefully; "it is all right! I have remembered everything; and Mr. Arbuthnot will go out presently and secure your inheritance."

Iris looked at Arnold.

"Yes, dear," she said. "You shall have your breakfast; and you shall tell me all about it when Arnold goes. And you will take a holiday, won't you—because I am twenty-one to-day?"

"Aha!" He was quite cheerful and mirthful, because he had recovered his memory. "Aha, my dear! all is well! You are twenty-one, and I am seventy-five; and Mr. Arbuthnot will go and bring home the—the inheritance. And I shall sit here all day long. It was a good dream that came to me this morning, was it not? Quite a voice from Heaven, which said, 'Get up and write down the letter while you remember it.' I got up; I found by the—by the merest accident Mr. Arbuthnot on the stairs, and we have arranged everything for you—everything."

IX.

DR. WASHINGTON.

Arnold returned to his studio, sat down, and fell fast asleep.

He was awakened about noon by his cousin Clara.

"Oh, Arnold," she cried, shaking him wrathfully by the arm, "this is a moment of the greatest excitement and importance to me, and you are my only adviser, and you are asleep!"

He sprang to his feet.

"I am awake now, Clara. Anxiety and trouble? On account of our talk yesterday?"

He saw that she had been crying. In her hands she had a packet of letters.

"Oh, no, no! it is far more important than that. As for our talk——"

"I am engaged to her, Clara."

"So I expected," she replied coldly. "But I am not come here about your engagement. And you do not want my congratulations, I suppose?"

"I should like to have your good wishes, Clara."

"Oh, Arnold, that is what my poor Claude said when he deserted me and married the governess. You men want to have your own way, and then expect us to be delighted with it."

"I expect nothing, Clara. Pray understand that."

"I told Claude, when he wrote asking forgiveness, that he had my good wishes, whatever he chose to do, but that I would not on any account receive his wife. Very well, Arnold; that is exactly what I say to you."

"Very well, Clara; I quite understand. As for the studio, and all the things that you have given me, they are, of course, yours again. Let me restore what I can to you."

"No, Arnold; they are yours. Let me hear no more about things that are your own. Of course your business, as you call it, is exciting. But as for this other thing, it is far more important. Something has happened; something I always expected; something that I looked forward to for years; although it has waited on the way so long, it has actually come at last, when I had almost forgotten to look for it. So true it is, Arnold, that good fortune and misfortune alike come when we least expect them."

Arnold sat down. He knew his cousin too well to interrupt her. She had her own way of telling a story, and it was a roundabout way.

"I cannot complain, after twenty years, can I? I have had plenty of rope, as you would say. But still, it has come at last; and, naturally, when it does come, it is a shock."

"Is it hereditary gout, Clara?"

"Gout! Nonsense, Arnold! When the will was read, I said to myself, 'Claude is certain to come back and claim his own. It is his right, and I hope he will come. But for my own part, I have not the least intention of calling upon the governess.' Then three or four years passed away, and I heard—I do not remember how—that he was dead. And then I waited for his heirs; his children, or their guardians; but they did not come."

"And now they have really come? Oh, Clara, this is indeed a misfortune!"

"No, Arnold: call it a restitution, not a misfortune. I have been living all these years on the money which belongs to Claude's heir."

"There was a son, then. And now he has dropped upon us from the clouds?"

"It is a daughter, not a son. But you shall hear. I received a letter this morning from a person called Dr. Joseph Washington, stating that he wrote to me on account of the only child and heiress of the late Claude Deseret."

"Who is Dr. Joseph Washington?"

"He is a physician, he says, and an American."

"Yes; will you go on?"

"I do not mind it, Arnold; I really do not. I must give up my house and put down my carriage, but it is for Claude's daughter. I rejoice to think that he has left some one behind him. Arnold, that face upon your canvas really has got eyes wonderfully like his, if it was not a mere fancy, when I saw it yesterday. I am glad, I say, to give up everything to the child of Claude."

"You think so kindly of him, Clara, who inflicted so much pain on you."

"I can never think bitterly of Claude. We were brought up together; we were like brother and sister; he never loved me in any other way. Oh, I understood it all years ago. To begin with, I was never beautiful: and it was his father's mistake. Well: this American followed up his letter by a visit. In the letter he merely said he had come to London with the heiress. But he called an hour ago, and brought me—oh, Arnold, he brought me one more letter from Claude. It has been waiting for me for eighteen years. After all that time, after eighteen years, my poor dead Claude speaks to me again. My dear, when I thought he was miserable on account of his marriage, I was wrong. His wife made him happy, and he died because she died." The tears came into her eyes again. "Poor boy! Poor Claude! The letter speaks of his child. It says——" She opened and read the letter. "He says: 'Some day my child will, I hope, come to you, and say: "Cousin Clara, I am Iris Deseret."'"

"Iris?" said Arnold.

"It is her name, Arnold. It was the child's grandmother's name."

"A strange coincidence," he said. "Pray go on."

"'She will say: "Cousin Clara, I am Iris Deseret." Then you

will be kind to her, as you would to me, if I were to come home again.' I cannot read any more, my dear, even to you."

"Did this American give you any other proof of what he asserts?"

"He gave me a portrait of Claude, taken years ago, when he was a boy of sixteen, and showed me the certificate of marriage, and the child's certificate of baptism, and letters from his wife. I suppose nothing more can be wanted."

"I dare say it is all right, Clara. But why was not the child brought over before?"

"Because—this is the really romantic part of the story—when her father died, leaving the child, she was adopted by these charitable Americans, and no one ever thought of examining the papers, which were lying in a desk, until the other day."

"You have not seen the young lady."

"No; he is to bring her to-morrow."

"And what sort of a man is this American? Is he a gentleman?"

"Well, I do not quite know. Perhaps Americans are different from Englishmen. If he was an Englishman, I should say without any hesitation that he is not a gentleman, as we count good breeding and good manners. He is a big man, handsome and burly, and he seems good-tempered. When I told him what was the full amount of Iris's inheritance——"

"Iris's inheritance!" Arnold repeated. "I beg your pardon, Clara; pray go on; but it seems like a dream."

"He only laughed, and said he was glad she would have so much. The utmost they hoped, he said, was that it might be a farm, or a house or two, or a few hundreds in the stocks. He is to bring her to-morrow, and of course I shall make her stay with me. As for himself, he says that he is only anxious to get back home to his wife and his practice."

"He wants nothing for himself, then? That seems a good sign."

"I asked him that question, and he said that he could not possibly take money for what he and his family had done for Iris; that is to say, her education and maintenance. This was very generous of him. Perhaps he is really a gentleman by birth, but has provincial manners. He said, however, that he had no objection to receiving the small amount of money spent on the voyage and on Iris's outfit, because they were not rich people, and it was a serious thing to fit out a young lady suitably. So of course I gave him what he suggested, a cheque for two hundred pounds. No one, he added with true feeling, would grudge a single dollar that had been spent upon the education of the dear girl; and this went to my heart."

"She is well educated, then?"

"She sings well," he says, "and has had a good plain education. He said I might rest assured that she was ladylike, because she had been brought up among his own friends."

"That is a very safe guarantee," said Arnold, laughing. "I wonder if she is pretty?"

"I asked him that question too, and he replied very oddly that she had a most splendid figure, which fetched everybody. Is not that rather a vulgar expression?"

"It is, in England. Perhaps in America it belongs to the first circles, and is a survivor of the Pilgrim Fathers. So you gave him a cheque for two hundred pounds?"

"Yes; surely I was not wrong, Arnold. Consider the circumstances, the outfit and the voyage, and the man's reluctance and delicacy of feeling."

"I dare say you were quite right, but—well, I think I should have seen the young lady first. Remember, you have given the money to a stranger, on his bare word."

"Oh, Arnold, this man is perfectly honest. I would answer for his truth and honesty. He has frank, honest eyes. Besides, he brought me all those letters. Well, dear, you are not going to desert me because you are engaged, are you, Arnold? I want you to be present when she comes to-morrow morning."

"Certainly I will be present, with the greatest—no, not the greatest pleasure. But I will be present—I will come to luncheon, Clara."

When she was gone he thought again of the strange coincidence, both of the man and of the inheritance. Yet what had his Iris in common with a girl who had been brought up in America? Besides, she had lost her inheritance, and this other Iris had crossed the ocean to receive hers. Yet a very strange coincidence. It was so strange that he told it to Iris and to Lala Roy. Iris laughed, and said she did not know she had a single namesake. Lala did not laugh; but he sat thinking in silence. There was no chess for him that night; instead of playing his usual game, Mr. Emblem, in his chair, laughed and chuckled in rather a ghastly way.

X.

"IT IS MY COUSIN."

"WELL, Joe," said his wife, "and how is it going to finish? It looks to me as if there was a prison-van and a police-court at the end. Don't you think we had better back out of it while there is time?"

"You're a fool!" her husband replied—it was the morning after his visit to Clara; "you know nothing about it. Now listen."

"I do nothing but listen; you've told me the story till I know it

by heart. Do you think anybody in the world will be so green as to believe such a clumsy plant as that?"

"Now look here, Lotty; if there's another word said—mind, now—you shall have nothing more to do with the business at all. I'll give it to a girl I know—a clever girl, who will carry it through with flying colours."

She set her lips hard, and drummed her fingers on the table. He knew how to rule his wife.

"Go on," she said, "since we can't be honest."

"Be reasonable, then; that's all I ask you. Honest! who is honest? Ain't we every one engaged in getting round our neighbours? Isn't the whole game, all the world over, lying and deceit? Honest! you might as well go on the boards without faking up your face, as try to live honest. Hold your tongue, then." He growled and swore, and after his fashion called on the Heavens to witness and express their astonishment.

The girl bent her head, and made no reply for a space. She was cowed and afraid. Presently she looked up and laughed, but with a forced laugh.

"Don't be cross, Joe; I'll do whatever you want me to do, and cheerfully, too, if it will do you any good. What is a woman good for but to help her husband? Only don't be cross, Joe."

She knew what her husband was by this time—a false and unscrupulous man. Yet she loved him. The case is not rare by any means, so that there is hope for all of us, from the meanest and most wriggling worm among us to the most hectoring ruffian.

"Why there, Lotty," he said, "that is what I like. Now listen. The old lady is a cake—do you understand? She is a sponge, she swallows everything, and is ready to fall on your neck and cry over you for joy. As for doubt or suspicion, not a word. I don't believe there will be a single question asked. No, it's all 'My poor dear Claude'—that's your father, Lotty—and 'My poor dear Iris'—that's you, Lotty."

"All right, Joe; go on. I am Iris—I am anybody you like. Go on."

"The more I think about it, the more I'm certain we shall do the trick. Only keep cool over the job, and forget the Music Hall. You are Iris Deseret, and you are the daughter of Claude Deseret, deceased. I am Dr. Washington, one of the American family who brought you up. You're grateful, mind. Nothing can be more lively than your gratitude. We've been brother and sister, you and me, and I've got a wife and young family and a rising practice at home in the State of Maine, and I am only come over here to see you into your rights at great personal expense. Paid a substitute. Yes, actually paid a substitute. We only found the papers the other day, which is the reason why we did not come over before, and I am going home again directly."

"You are not really going away, Joe, are you?"

"No, I am going to stay here; but I shall pretend to go away. Now remember, we've got no suspicion ourselves, and we don't expect to meet any. If there is any, we are surprised and sorry. We don't come to the lady with a lawyer or a blunderbuss; we come as friends, and we shall arrange this little business between ourselves. Oh, never you fear, we shall arrange it quite comfortably, without lawyers."

"How much do you think we shall get out of it, Joe?"

"Listen, and open your eyes. There's nearly a hundred and twenty thousand pounds and a small estate in the country. Don't let us trouble about the estate more than we can help. Estates mean lawyers. Money doesn't."

He spoke as if small sums like a hundred thousand pounds are carried about in the pocket.

"Good gracious! And you've got two hundred of it already, haven't you?"

"Yes, but what is two hundred out of a hundred and twenty thousand? A hundred and twenty thousand! There's spending in it, isn't there, Lotty? Gad, we'll make the money spin, I calculate! It may be a few weeks before the old lady transfers the money—I don't quite know where it is, but in stocks or something—to your name. As soon as it is in your name I've got a plan. We'll remember that you've got a sweetheart or something in America, and you'll break your heart for wanting to see him. And then nothing will do but you must run across for a trip. Oh, I'll manage, and we'll make the money fly."

He was always adding new details to his story, finding something to embellish it and heighten the effect; and now, having succeeded in getting the false Iris into the house, he began already to devise schemes to get her out again.

"A hundred thousand pounds! Why, Joe, it is a terrible great sum of money. Good gracious! What shall we do with it, when we get it?"

"I'll show you what to do with it, my girl."

"And you said, Joe—you declared that it is your own by rights."

"Certainly, it is my own. It would have been bequeathed to me by my own cousin. But she didn't know it. And she died without knowing it, and I am her heir."

Lotty wondered vaguely and rather sadly how much of this statement was true. But she did not dare to ask. She had promised her assistance. Every night she woke with a dreadful dream of a policeman knocking at the door; whenever she saw a man in blue she trembled; and she knew perfectly well that, if the plot failed, it was she herself, in all probability, and not her husband at all, who would be put in the dock. She did not believe a word about the cousin; she knew she was going to do a vile and dreadful wickedness, but she was ready to go through with it, or with anything else, to pleasure a husband who already,

the honeymoon hardly finished, showed the propensities of a rover.

"Very well, Lotty; we are going there at once. You need take nothing with you; but you won't come back here for a good spell. In fact, I think I shall have to give up these lodgings, for fear of accidents. I shall leave you with your cousin."

"Yes; and I'm to be quiet, and behave pretty, I suppose?"

"You'll be just as quiet and demure as you used to be when you were serving in the music-shop. No loud laughing, no capers, no comic songs, and no dancing."

"And am I to begin at once by asking for the money to be—what do you call it—transferred?"

"No; you are not on any account to say a word about the money. You are to go on living there without hinting at the money—without showing any desire to discuss the subject—perhaps for months, until there can't be the shadow of a doubt that you are the old woman's cousin. You are to make much of her, flatter her, cocker her up, find out all the family secrets, and get the length of her foot; but you are not to say one single word about the money. As for your manners, I'm not afraid of them, because, when you like, you can look and talk like a countess."

"I know now." She got up and changed her face so that it became at once subdued and quiet, like a quiet servant-girl behind a counter. "So: is that modest enough, Joe? And as for singing, I shall sing for her, but not music-hall trash. This kind of thing. Listen."

There was a piano in the room, and she sat down and sang to her own accompaniment, with a sweet, low voice, one of the soft, sad German songs.

"That'll do!" cried Joe. "Hang me! what a clever girl you are, Lotty! That's the kind of thing the swells like. As for me, give me ten minutes of Jolly Nash. But you know how to pull 'em in, Lotty."

It was approaching twelve, the hour when they were due. Lotty retired and arrayed herself in her quietest and most sober dress, a costume in some brown stuff, with a bonnet to match. She put on her best gloves and boots, having herself felt the inferiority of the shop-girl to the lady in those minor points; and she modified and mitigated her fringe, which, she knew, was rather more exaggerated than young ladies in Society generally wear.

"You're not afraid, Lotty?" said Joe, when at last she was ready to start.

"Afraid? Not I, Joe! Come along. I couldn't look quieter, not if I was to make up as I do in the evening as a Quakeress. Come along. Oh, Joe, it will be awful dull! Don't forget to send word to the Hall that I am ill. Afraid? Not I!" She laughed, but rather hysterically.

There would, however, she secretly considered, be some excite-

ment when it came to the finding out, which would happen, she was convinced, in a very few hours. In fact, she had no faith at all in the story being accepted and believed by anybody. To be sure, she herself had been trained, as ladies in shops generally are, to mistrust all mankind, and she could not understand at all the kind of confidence which comes of having the very thing presented to you which you ardently desire. When they arrived in Chester Square, she found waiting for her a lady who was certainly not beautiful, but she had kind eyes, which looked eagerly at the strange face, and with an expression of disappointment.

"It can't be the fringe," thought Lotty.

"Cousin Clara," she said, softly and sweetly, as her husband had taught her, "I am Iris Deseret, the daughter of your old playfellow, Claude."

"Oh, my dear! my dear!" cried Clara with enthusiasm. "Come to my arms! Welcome home again!"

She kissed and embraced her. Then she held her by both hands, and looked at her face again.

"My dear," she said, "you have been a long time coming. I had almost given up hoping that Claude had any children. But you are welcome, after all—very welcome. You are in your own house, remember, my dear. This house is yours, and the plate, and furniture, and everything, and I am only your tenant."

"Oh!" said Lotty, overwhelmed. Why, she had actually been taken on her word, or rather, the word of Joe!

"Let me kiss you again. Your face does not remind me as yet, in any single feature, of your father's; but I dare say I shall find resemblance presently; and, indeed, your voice does remind me of him already. He had a singularly sweet and delicate voice."

"Iris has a remarkably sweet and delicate voice," said Joe softly. "No doubt she got it from her father. You will hear her sing presently."

Lotty hardly knew her husband. His face was preternaturally solemn, and he looked as if he was engaged in the most serious business of his life.

"All her father's ways were gentle and delicate," said Clara.

"Just like hers," said Joe. "When all of us—American boys and girls, pretty rough at times—were playing and larking about, Iris would be just sittin' out like a cat on a carpet, quiet and demure. I suppose she got that way, too, from her father."

"No doubt; and as for your face, my dear, I dare say I shall find a likeness presently, but just now I see none. Will you take off your bonnet?"

When the girl's bonnet was off, Clara looked at her again, curiously, but kindly.

"I suppose I can't help looking for a likeness, my dear. But you must take after your mother, whom I never saw. Your father's eyes were full and limpid; yours are large, and clear, and

bright—very good eyes, my dear, but they are not limpid. His mouth was flexible and mobile, but yours is firm. Your hair, however, reminds me somewhat of his, which was much your light shade of brown when he was young. And now, sir"—she addressed Joe—"now you have brought this dear girl all the way across the Atlantic, what are you going to do?"

"Well, I don't exactly know that there's anything to keep me," said Joe. "You see, I've got my practice to look after at home—I am a physician, as I told you—and my wife and children; and the sooner I get back the better, now that I can leave Iris with her friends safe and comfortable. Stay," he added; "there are all those papers which I promised you—the certificates, and the rest of them. You had better take them all, miss, and keep them for Iris."

"Thank you," said Clara, touched by this confidence; "Iris will be safe with me. It is very natural that you should want to go home again. And you will be content to stay with me, my dear, won't you? You need not be afraid, sir; I assure you that her interests will not in any way suffer. Tell her to write and let you know exactly what is done. Let her, however, since she is an English girl, remain with English friends, and get to know her cousins and relations. You can safely trust her with me, Dr. Washington."

"Thank you," said Joe. "You know that when one has known a girl all her life, one is naturally anxious about her happiness. We are almost brother and sister."

"I know; and I am sure, Mr. Washington, we ought to be most grateful to you. As for the money you have expended upon her, let me once more beg of you——"

Joe waved his hand majestically.

"As for that," he said, "the money is spent. Iris is welcome to it, if it were ten times as much. Now, madam, you trusted me, the very first day that you saw me, with two hundred pounds sterling. Only an English lady would have done that. You trusted me without asking me who or what I was, or doubting my word. I assure you, madam, I felt that kindness, and that trust, very much indeed; and in return, I have brought you Iris herself. After all expenses paid of coming over and getting back, buying a few things for Iris, if I find that there's anything over, I shall ask you to take back the balance. Madam, I thank you for the money, but I am sure I have repaid you—with Iris."

This was a very clever speech. If there had been a shadow of doubt before it in Clara's heart (which there was not), it would vanish now. She cordially and joyfully accepted her newly-found cousin.

"And now, Iris," he said, with a manly tremor in his voice, "I do not know if I shall see you again before I go away. If not, I shall take your fond love to all of them at home—Tom, and Dick,

and Harry, and Harriet, and Prissy, and all of them"—Joe really was carrying the thing through splendidly—"and perhaps, my dear, when you are a grand lady in England, you will give a thought—a thought now and again—to your old friends across the water."

"Oh, Joe!" cried Lotty, really carried away with admiration, and ashamed of her sceptical spirit. "Oh," she whispered, "ain't you splendid!"

"But you must not go, Dr. Washington," said Clara, "without coming again to say farewell. Will you not dine with us to-night? Will you stay and have lunch?"

"No, madam, I thank you. It will be best for me to leave Iris alone with you. The sooner she learns your English ways and forgets American ways, the better."

"But you are not going to start away for Liverpool at once? You will stay a day or two in London——"

The American Physician said that perhaps he might stay a week longer for scientific purposes.

"Have you got enough money, Joe?" asked the new Iris thoughtfully.

Joe gave a glance of infinite admiration.

"Well," he said, "the fact is that I should like to buy a few books and things. Perhaps——"

"Cousin," said Lotty eagerly, "please give him a cheque for a hundred pounds. Make it a hundred. You said everything was mine. No, Joe, I won't hear a word about repayment, as if a little thing like fifty pounds, or a hundred pounds, should want to be repaid! As if you and I could ever talk about repayment!"

Clara did as she was asked readily and eagerly. Then Joe departed, promising to call and say farewell before he left England, and resolving that in his next visit—his last visit—there should be another cheque. But he had made one mistake: he had parted with the papers. No one in any situation of life should ever give up the power until he has secured the substance. But it is human to err.

"And now, my dear," said Clara warmly, "sit down and let us talk. Arnold is coming to lunch with us, and to make your acquaintance."

When Arnold came a few minutes later, he was astonished to find his cousin already on the most affectionate terms with the newly-arrived Iris Deseret. She was walking about the room showing her the pictures of her grandfather and other ancestors, and they were hand-in-hand.

"Arnold," said Clara, "this is Iris, and I hope you will both be great friends: Iris, this is my cousin, but he is not yours."

"I don't pretend to know how that may be," said the young lady. "But then I am glad to know all your cousins, whether they are mine or not; only don't bother me with questions, because I don't remember anything, and I don't know anything. Why, until the

other day I did not even know that I was an English lady, not until they found those papers."

A strange accent for an American! and she certainly said "laidy" for "lady," and "paiper" for "paper," like a cockney. Alas! This comes of London Music Halls, even to country-bred damsels!

Arnold made a mental observation that the new-comer might be called anything in the world, but could not be called a lady. She was handsome, certainly, but how could Claude Deseret's daughter have grown in so common a type of beauty? Where was the delicacy of feature and manner which Clara had never ceased to commend in speaking of her lost cousin?

"Iris," said Clara, "is our little savage from the American Forest. She is Queen Pocahontas, who has come over to conquer England and to win all our hearts. My dear, my cousin Arnold will help me to make you an English girl."

She spoke as if the State of Maine was still the hunting-ground of Sioux and Iroquois.

Arnold thought that a less American-looking girl he had never seen; that she did not speak or look like a lady was to be expected perhaps, if she had, as was probable, been brought up by rough and unpolished people. But he had no doubt, any more than Clara herself, as to the identity of the girl. Nobody ever doubts a claimant. Every impostor, from Demetrius downwards, has gained his supporters and partizans by simply living among them and keeping up the imposition. It is so easy, in fact, to be a claimant, that it is wonderful there are not more of them.

Then luncheon was served, and the young lady not only showed a noble appetite, but, to Arnold's astonishment, confessed to an ardent love for bottled stout.

"Most American ladies," he said impertinently, "only drink water, do they not?"

Lotty perceived that she had made a mistake.

"I only drink stout," she said, "when the doctor tells me. But I like it all the same."

She certainly had no American accent. But she would not talk much; she was perhaps shy. After luncheon, however, Clara asked her if she would sing, and she complied, showing considerable skill with her accompaniment, and singing a simple song in good taste and with a sweet voice. Arnold observed, however, that there was some weakness about the letter "h," less common among Americans than among the English. Presently he went away, and the girl, who had been aware that he was watching her, breathed more easily.

"Who is your cousin Arnold?" she asked.

"My dear, he is my cousin, but not yours. You will not see him often, because he is going to be married, I am sorry to say, and to be married beneath him—oh, it is dreadful!—to some tradesman's girl, my dear."

"Dreadful!" said Iris, with a queer look in her eyes. "Well, cousin, I don't want to see much of him. He's a good-looking chap, too, though rather too finicking for my taste. I like a man who looks as if he could knock another man down. Besides, he looks at me as if I was a riddle, and he wanted to find out the answer."

In the evening Arnold found that no change had come over the old man. He was, however, perfectly happy, so that, considering the ruin of his worldly prospects, it was, perhaps, as well that he had parted for a time, at least, with his wits. Some worldly misfortunes there are which should always produce this effect.

"You told me," said Lala Roy, "that another Iris had just come from America to claim an inheritance of your cousin."

"Yes; it is a very strange coincidence."

"Very strange. Two Englishmen die in America at the same time, each having a daughter named Iris, and each daughter entitled to some kind of inheritance."

Lala Roy spoke slowly, and with meaning.

"Oh!" cried Arnold. "It is more than strange. Do you think—is it possible——"

He could not for the moment clothe his thoughts in words.

"Do you know if anyone has brought this girl to England?"

"Yes; she was brought over by a young American Physician—one of the family who adopted and brought her up."

"What is he like—the young American Physician?"

"I have not seen him."

"Go, my young friend, to-morrow morning, and ask your cousin if this photograph resembles the American Physician."

It was the photograph of a handsome young fellow, with strongly marked features, apparently tall and well set-up.

"Lala, you don't really suspect anything—you don't think——"

"Hush! I know who has stolen the papers. Perhaps the same man has produced the heiress."

"And you think—you suspect that the man who stole the papers is connected with—— But then those papers must be—oh, it cannot be! For then Iris would be Clara's cousin—Clara's cousin—and the other an impostor."

"Even so; everything is possible. But, silence. Do not speak a word, even to Iris. If the papers are lost, they are lost. Say nothing to her yet: but go—go, and find out if that photograph resembles the American Physician. The river wanders here and there, but the sea swallows it at last.

XI.

MR. JAMES MAKES ATONEMENT.

JAMES arrived as usual in the morning at nine o'clock, in order to take down the shutters. To his astonishment, he found Lala Roy and Iris waiting for him in the back-shop. And they had grave faces.

"James," said Iris, "your master has suffered a great shock, and is not himself this morning. His safe has been broken open by some one, and most important papers have been taken out."

"Papers, miss—papers? Out of the safe?"

"Yes. They are papers of no value whatever to the thief, whoever he may be. But they are of the very greatest importance to us. Your master seems to have lost his memory for a while, and cannot help us in finding out who has done this wicked thing. You have been a faithful servant for so long that I am sure you will do what you can for us. Think for us. Try to remember if anybody besides yourself has had access to this room when your master was out of it."

James sat down. He felt that he must sit down, though Lala Roy was looking at him with eyes full of doubt and suspicion. The whole enormity of his own guilt, though he had not stolen anything, fell upon him. He had got the key; he had given it to Mr. Joseph; and he had received it back again. In fact, at that very moment it was lying in his pocket. The worst that he had feared had happened. The safe was robbed.

He was struck with so horrible a dread, and so fearful a looking forward to judgment and condemnation, that his teeth chattered and his eye gave way.

"You will think it over, James," said Iris; "think it over, and tell us presently if you can remember anything."

"Think it over, Mr. James," Lala Roy repeated in his deepest tone, and with emphatic gesture of his right forefinger. "Think it over carefully. Like a lamp that is never extinguished are the eyes of the faithful servant."

They left him, and James fell back into his chair with hollow cheek and beating heart.

"He told me," he murmured—"oh, the villain!—he swore to me that he had taken nothing from the safe. He said he only looked in it, and read the contents. The scoundrel! He has stolen the papers! He must have known they were there. And then, to save himself, he put me on to the job. For who would be suspected if not—oh, Lord!—if not me?"

He grasped his paste-brush, and attacked his work with a feverish anxiety to find relief in exertion; but his heart was not in it, and

presently a thought pierced his brain, as an arrow pierceth the heart, and under the pang, and agony of it, his face turned ashy pale, and the big drops stood upon his brow.

"For," he thought, "suppose that the thing gets abroad; suppose they were to advertise a reward; suppose the man who made the key were to see the advertisement or to hear about it! And he knows my name, too, and my business; and he'll let out for a reward—I know he will—who it was ordered that key of him."

Already he saw himself examined before a magistrate; already he saw in imagination that locksmith's man who made the key kissing the Testament, and giving his testimony in clear and distinct words, which could not be shaken.

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" he groaned. "No one will believe me, even if I do confess the truth; and as for him, I know him well; if I go to him, he'll only laugh at me. But I must go to him—I must!"

He was so goaded by his terror that he left the shop unprotected—a thing he had never thought to do—and ran as fast as he could to Joe's lodgings. But he had left them; he was no longer there; he had not been there for six weeks; the landlady did not know his address, or would not give it. Then James felt sick and dizzy, and would have sat down on the doorstep and cried, but for the look of the thing. Besides, he remembered the unprotected shop. So he turned away sadly and walked back, well understanding now that he had fallen like a fool into a trap, artfully set to fasten suspicion and guilt upon himself.

When he returned he found the place full of people. Mr. Emblem was sitting in his customary place, and he was smiling. He did not look in the least like a man who had been robbed. He was smiling pleasantly and cheerfully. Mr. Chalker was also present, a man with whom no one ever smiled, and Lala Roy, solemn and dignified, and a man—an unknown man—who sat in the outer shop, and seemed to take no interest at all in the proceedings. Were they come, he asked himself, to arrest him on the spot?

Apparently they were not, for no one took the least notice of him, and they were occupied with something else. How could they think of anything else? Yet Mr. Chalker, standing at the table, was making a speech, which had nothing to do with the robbery.

"Here I am, you see, Mr. Emblem," he said; "I have told you already that I don't want to do anything to worry you. Let us be friends all round. This gentleman, your friend from India, will advise you, I am sure, for your own good, not to be obstinate. Lord! what is the amount, after all, to a substantial man like yourself? A substantial man, I say." He spoke confidently, but he glanced about the shop with doubtful eyes. "Granted that it was borrowed to get your grandson out of a scrape—supposing he promised to pay it back and hasn't done so; putting the case that it has grown and developed itself as bills will do, and can't help doing,

and can't be stopped; it isn't the fault of the lawyers, but the very nature of a bill to go on growing—it's like a baby for growing. Why, after all, you were your grandson's security—you can't escape that. And when I would no longer renew, you gave of your own accord—come now, you can't deny that—a bill of sale on goods and furniture. Now, Mr. Emblem, didn't you? Don't let us have any bitterness or quarrelling. Let's be friends, and tell me I may send away the man."

Mr. Emblem smiled pleasantly, but did not reply.

"A bill of sale it was, dated January the 25th, 1883, just before that cursed Act of Parliament granted the five days' notice. Here is the bailiff's man in possession. You can pay the amount, which is, with costs and Sheriff's Poundage, three hundred and fifty-one pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence, at once, or you may pay it five days hence. Otherwise the shop, and furniture, and all, will be sold off in seven days."

"Oh," James gasped, listening with bewilderment, "we can't be going to be sold up! Emblem's to be sold up!"

"Three hundred and fifty pounds!" said Mr. Emblem. "My friend, let us rather speak of thousands. This is a truly happy day for all of us. Sit down, Mr. Chalker—my dear friend, sit down. Rejoice with us. A happy morning."

"What the devil is the matter with him?" asked the money-lender.

"There was something, Mr. Chalker," Mr. Emblem went on cheerfully, "something said about my grandson. Joe was always a bad lot; lucky his father and mother are out of the way in Australia. You came to me about that business, perhaps? Oh, on such a joyful day as this I forgive everybody. Tell Joe I do not want to see him, but I have forgiven him."

"Oh, he's mad!" growled James; "he's gone stark staring mad!"

"You don't seem quite yourself this morning, Mr. Emblem," said Mr. Chalker. "Perhaps this gentleman, your friend from India, will advise you when I am gone. You don't understand, Mister," he addressed Lala Roy, "the nature of a bill. Once you start a bill, and begin to renew it, it's like planting a tree, for it grows and grows of its own accord, and by Act of Parliament, too, though they do try to hack and cut it down in the most cruel way. You see, Mr. Emblem is obstinate. He's got to pay off that bill, which is a bill of sale, and he won't do it. Make him write the cheque and have done with it."

"This is the best day's work I ever did," Mr. Emblem went on. "To remember the letter, word for word, and everything! Mr. Arbuthnot has, very likely, finished the whole business by now. Thousands—thousands—and all for Iris!"

"Look here, Mr. Emblem," said the lawyer angrily. "You'll not only be a bankrupt if you go on like this, but you'll be a fraudulent

bankrupt as well. Is it honest, I want to know, to refuse your just debts when you've put by thousands, as you boast—you actually boast—for your granddaughter?"

"Yes," said the old man, "Iris will have thousands."

"I think, sir," said Lala Roy, "that you are under an illusion. Mr. Emblem does not possess any such savings or investments as you imagine."

"Then why does he go on talking about thousands?"

"He has had a shock: he cannot quite understand what has happened. You had better leave him for the present."

"Leave him! And nothing but these mouldy old books! Here, you sir—you—James—you shopman—come here! What is the stock worth?"

"It depends upon whether you are buying or selling," said James. "If you were to sell it under the hammer, in lots, it wouldn't fetch a hundred pounds."

"There, you hear—you hear, all of you! Not a hundred pounds, and my bill of sale is three-fifty."

"Pray, sir," said Lala Roy, "who told you that Mr. Emblem was so wealthy?"

"His grandson."

"Then, sir, perhaps it would be well to question the grandson further. He may know things of which we have heard nothing."

The Act of 1882, which came into operation in the following January, is cruel indeed, I am told, to those who advanced money on bills of sale before that date, for it allows—it actually allows the debtor five clear days during which he may, if he can, without being caught, make away with portions of his furniture and belongings—the smaller and the more precious portion; or he may find some one else to lend him the money, and so get off clear and save his sticks. It is, as the modern Shylock declares, a most wicked and iniquitous Act, by which the shark may be baulked, and many an honest tradesman, who would otherwise have been most justly ruined, is enabled to save his stock, and left to worry along until the times become more prosperous. To a man like Mr. David Chalker, such an Act of Parliament is most revolting.

He went away at length, leaving the man—the professional person—behind. Then Lala Roy persuaded Mr. Emblem to go upstairs again. He did so without any apparent consciousness that there was a Man in Possession.

"James," said Lala Roy, "you have heard that your master has been robbed. You are reflecting and meditating on this circumstance. Another thing is, that a creditor has threatened to sell off everything for a debt. Most likely everything will be sold and the shop closed. You will, therefore, lose the place you have had for five-and-twenty years. That is a very bad business for you. You are unfortunate this morning—to lose your place, and then this robbery. That seems also a bad business."

"It is," said James, with a hollow groan; "it is, Mr. Lala Roy. It is a dreadful bad business."

"Pray, Mr. James," continued this man, with grave, searching eyes, which made sinners shake in their shoes—"pray, why did you run away, and where did you go, after you opened the shop this morning? You went to see Mr. Emblem's grandson, did you not?"

"Yes, I did," said James.

"Why did you go to see him?"

"I w—w—went—oh, Lord!—I went to tell him what had happened, because he is master's grandson, and I thought he ought to know," said James.

"Did you tell him?"

"No; he has left his lodgings. I don't know where he is. Oh, and he always told me the shop was his—settled on him!" he said.

"He is the Father of Lies; his end will be confusion. Shame and confusion shall wait upon all who have hearkened unto him or worked with him, until they repent and make atonement."

"Don't, Mr. Lala Roy—don't! you frighten me!" said James. "Oh, what a dreadful Liar he is!"

All that morning the Philosopher sat in the bookseller's chair, and James, in the outer shop, felt that those deep eyes were resting continually upon him, and knew that bit by bit his secret would be dragged from him. If he could get up and run away—if a customer would come—if the dark gentleman would go upstairs—if he could think of something else! But none of these things happened, and James, at his table with the paste before him, passed a morning compared with which any seat anywhere in Purgatory would have been comfortable. Presently a strange feeling came over him, as if some invisible force was pushing and dragging him and forcing him to leave his chair, and throw himself at the Philosopher's feet and confess everything. This was the mesmeric effect of those reproachful eyes fixed steadily upon him. And in the doorway, like some figure in a nightmare—a figure incongruous and out of place—the Man in Possession sitting, passive and unconcerned, with one eye on the street and the other on the shop. Upstairs, Mr. Emblem was sitting fast asleep—joy had made him sleepy; and Iris was at work among her pupils' letters, compiling sums for the Fruiterer, making a paper on Conic Sections for the Cambridge man, and working out Trigonometrical Equations for the young schoolmaster, and her mind full of a solemn exultation and glory, for she was a woman who was loved. The other things troubled her but little. Her grandfather would get back his equilibrium of mind; the shop might be shut up, but that mattered little. Arnold, and Lala Roy, and her grandfather, and herself, would all live together, and she and Arnold would work. The selfishness of youth is really astonishing. Nothing—except, per-

haps, toothache—can make a girl unhappy who is loved and newly betrothed. She may say what she pleases, and her face may be a yard long when she speaks of the misfortunes of others, but all the time her heart is dancing.

To Lala Roy the situation presented a problem with insufficient data, some of which would have to be guessed. A letter, now lost, said that a certain case contained papers necessary to obtain an unknown inheritance for Iris. How, then, to ascertain whether anybody was expecting or looking for a girl to claim an inheritance? Then there was half a coat-of-arms; and lastly, there was a certain customer of unknown name, who had been acquainted with Iris's father before his marriage. So far for Iris. As for the thief, Lala Roy had no doubt at all. It was, he was quite certain, the grandson, whose career he had watched for some years with interest and curiosity. Who else was there who would steal the papers? And who would help him, and give him access to the safe? He did not only suspect—he was certain that James was in some way cognisant of the deed. Why else did he turn so pale? Why did he rush off to Joe's lodgings? Why did he sit trembling?

At half-past twelve Lala Roy rose.

"It is your dinner-hour," he said to James; and it seemed to the unhappy man as if he was saying, "I know all." "It is your dinner-hour; go, eat, refresh the body. Whom should suspicion affright except the guilty?"

James put on his hat and sneaked—he felt that he was sneaking—out of the shop.

During his dinner-hour, Joseph himself called. It was an unusual thing to see him at any time; in fact, as he was never wont to call upon his grandfather unless he was in a scrape and wanted money: no one ever made the poor young man welcome, or begged him to come more often.

But this morning he walked upstairs, and appeared so cheerful, so entirely free from any self-reproach for past sins, and so easy in his mind, without the least touch of the old hang-dog look, that Iris began to reproach herself for thinking badly of her cousin.

When he was told about the robbery, he expressed the greatest surprise that anyone in the world could be so wicked as to rob an old man like his grandfather. Besides his abhorrence of crime in the abstract, he affirmed that the robbery of a safe was a species of villainy for which hanging was too mild—much too mild a punishment. He then asked his grandfather what were the contents of the packet stolen; and when he received no answer except a pleasant and a cheery laugh, he asked Iris, and learned to his sorrow that the contents were unknown, and could not, therefore, be identified, even if they were found. This, he said, was a thousand pities, because if they had been known, a reward might have been offered. For his own part, he would advise the greatest

caution. Nothing at all should be done at first; no step should be taken which might awaken suspicion; they should go on as if the papers were without value. As for that, they had no real proof that there was any robbery. Iris thought of telling him about the water-mark of the blank pages, but refrained. Perhaps there was no robbery after all—who was to prove what had been inside the packet? But if there had been papers, and if they were valueless except to the rightful owners, they would, perhaps, be sent back voluntarily; or after a time, say a year or two, they might be advertised for; not as if the owners were very anxious to get them, and not revealing the nature of the papers, but cautiously; and presently, if they had not been destroyed, the holders of the papers would answer the advertisement, and then a moderate reward might, after a while, be offered; and so on, giving excellent advice. While he was speaking, Lala Roy entered the room in his noiseless manner, and took his accustomed chair.

"And what do you think, sir?" said Joseph, when he had finished. "You have heard my advice. You are not an Englishman, but I suppose you've got some intelligence."

Lala bowed and spread his hands, but replied not.

"Your opinion should be asked," Joseph went on, "because, you see, as the only other person, besides my grandfather and my cousin, in the house, you might yourself be suspected. Indeed," he added, "I have no doubt you will be suspected. When I take over the conduct of the case, which will be my task, I suppose, it will, perhaps, be my duty to suspect you."

Lala bowed again and again, spread his hands, but did not speak.

In fact, Joseph now perceived that he was having the conversation wholly to himself. His grandfather sat passive, listening as one who, in a dream, hears voices but does not heed what they are saying, yet smiling politely. Iris listened, but paid no heed. She thought that a great deal of fuss was being made about papers, which, perhaps, were worth nothing. And as for her inheritance, why, as she never expected to get any, she was not going to mourn the loss of what, perhaps, was worth nothing.

"Very well, then," said Joseph, "that's all I've got to say. I've given you the best advice I can, and I suppose I may go. Have you lost your voice, Iris?"

"No; but I think you had better go, Joseph. My grandfather is not able to talk this morning, and I dare say your advice is very good, but we have other advisers."

"As for you, Mr. Lala Roy, or whatever you call yourself," said Joe roughly, "I've warned you. Suspicion will certainly fall upon you, and what I say is—take care. For my own part, I never did believe in niggers, and I wouldn't have one in my house."

Lala Roy again bowed and spread his fingers.

Then Joseph went away. The door between the shop and the hall was half-open, and he looked in. A strange man was sitting in

the outer shop, a pipe in his mouth, and James was leaning his head upon his hands, with wild and haggard eyes gazing straight before him.

"Poor devil!" murmured Joseph. "I feel for him, I do indeed. He had the key made—for himself; he certainly let me use it once, but only once, and who's to prove it? And he's had the opportunity every day of using it himself. That's very awkward, Foxy, my boy. If I were Foxy, I should be in a funk, myself."

He strolled away, thinking that all promised well. Lotty most favourably and unsuspiciously received in her new character; no one knowing the contents of the packet; his grandfather gone silly; and for himself, he had had the opportunity of advising exactly what he wished to be done—namely, that silence and inaction should be observed for a space, in order to give the holders of the property a chance of offering terms. What better advice could he give? And what line of action would be better or safer for himself?

If James had known who was in the house-passage, the other side of the door, there would, I think, have been a collision of two solid bodies. But he did not know, and presently Lala Roy came back, and the torture began again. James took down books and put them up again; he moved about feverishly, doing nothing, with a duster in his hand; but all the time he felt those deep accusing eyes upon him with a silence worse than a thousand questions. He knew—he was perfectly certain—that he should be found out. And all the trouble for nothing! and the Bailiff's man in possession, and the safe robbed, and those eyes upon him, saying, as plain as eyes could speak, "Thou art the Man!"

"And Joe is the man," said James; "not me at all. What I did was wrong, but I was tempted. Oh, what a precious liar and villain he is! And what a fool I've been!"

The day passed more slowly than it seemed possible for any day to pass; always the man in the shop; always the deep eyes of the silent Hindoo upon him. It was a relief when, once, Mr. Chalker looked in and surveyed the shelves with a suspicious air, and asked if the old man had by this time listened to reason.

It is the business of him who makes plunder out of other men's distresses—as the jackal feeds upon the offal and the putrid carcase—to know as exactly as he can how his fellow-creatures are situated. For this reason such an one doth diligently inquire, listen, pick up secrets, put two and two together, and pry curiously into everybody's affairs, being never so happy as when he gets an opportunity of going to the rescue of a sinking man. Thus among those who lived in good repute about the lower end of the King's Road, none had a better name than Mr. Emblem, and no one was considered to have made more of his chances. And it was with joy that Mr. Chalker received Joe one evening and heard from him the dismal story, that if he could not find fifty pounds within a few hours, he was ruined. The fifty pounds was raised on a bill bearing Mr. Emblem's name.

When it was presented, however, and the circumstances explained, the old gentleman, who had at first refused to own the signature, accepted it meekly, and told no one that his grandson had written it himself, and without the polite formality of asking permission to sign for him. In other words, Joseph was a forger, and Mr. Chalker knew it, and this made him the more astonished when Mr. Emblem did not take up the bill, but got it renewed quarter after quarter, substituting at length a bill of sale, as if he was determined to pay as much as possible for his grandson's sins.

"Where is he?" asked the money-lender angrily. "Why doesn't he come down and face his creditors?"

"Master's upstairs," said James, "and you've seen yourself, Mr. Chalker, that he is off his chump. And oh, sir, who would have thought that Emblem's would have come to ruin?"

"But there's something, James—— Come, think—there must be something."

"Mr. Joseph said there were thousands. But he's a terrible liar—oh, Mr. Chalker, he's a terrible liar and villain! Why, he's even deceived me!"

"What? Has he borrowed your money?"

"Worse—worse. Do you know where I could find him, sir?"

"Well, I don't know——" Mr. Chalker was not in the habit of giving addresses, but in this case, perhaps Joe might be squeezed as well as his grandfather. Unfortunately that bill with the signature had been destroyed. "I don't know. Perhaps if I find out I may tell you. And, James, if you can learn anything—this rubbish won't fetch half the money—I'll make it worth your while, James, I will indeed."

"I'll make him take his share," said James to himself. "If I have to go to prison, he shall go too. They shan't send me without sending him."

He looked round. The watchful eyes were gone. The Hindoo had gone away noiselessly. James breathed again.

"After all," he said, "how are they to find out? How are they to prove anything? Mr. Joseph took the things, and I helped him to a key; and he isn't likely to split, and—oh, Lord, if they were to find it!" For at that moment he felt the duplicate key in his waistcoat-pocket. "If they were to find it!"

He took the key out, and looked at the bright and innocent-looking thing, as a murderer might look at his blood-stained dagger.

Just then, as he gazed upon it, holding it just twelve inches in front of his nose, one hand was laid upon his shoulder, and another took the key from between his fingers.

He turned quickly, and his knees gave way, and he sank upon the floor, crying:

"Oh, Mr. Lala Roy, sir, Mr. Lala Roy, I am not the thief! I am innocent! I will tell you all about it! I will confess all to

you! I will indeed! I will make atonement! Oh, what a miserable fool I've been!"

"Upon the heels of Folly," said the Sage, "treadeth Shame. You will now be able to understand the words of wisdom, which say of the wicked man, 'The curse of iniquity pursueth him; he liveth in continual fear; the anxiety of his mind taketh vengeance upon him.' Stand up and speak."

The Man in Possession looked on as if an incident of this kind was too common in families for him to take any notice of it. Nothing, in fact, is able to awaken astonishment in the heart of the Man in Possession, because nothing is sacred to him except the "sticks" he has to guard. To Iris, the event was, however, of importance, because it afforded Lala Roy a chance of giving Arnold that photograph, no other than an early portrait of Mr. Emblem's grandson.

XII.

IS THIS HIS PHOTOGRAPH?

THE best way to get a talk with his cousin was to dine with her. Arnold therefore went to Chester Square next day with the photograph in his pocket. It was half an hour before dinner when he arrived, and Clara was alone.

"My dear," she cried with enthusiasm, "I am charmed—I am delighted—with Iris."

"I am glad," said Arnold mendaciously.

"I am delighted with her—in every way. She is more and better than I could have expected—far more. A few Americanisms, of course——"

"No doubt," said Arnold. "When I saw her I thought they rather resembled Anglicisms. But you have had opportunities of judging. You have in your own possession," he continued, "have you not all the papers which establish her identity?"

"Oh yes; they are all locked up in my strong-box. I shall be very careful of them. Though, of course, there is no one who has to be satisfied except myself. And I am perfectly satisfied. But then I never had any doubt from the beginning. How could there be any doubt?"

"How, indeed?"

"Truth, honour, loyalty, and candour, as well as gentle descent, are written on that girl's noble brow, Arnold, plain, so that all may read. It is truly wonderful," she went on, "how the old gentle blood shows itself, and will break out under the most unexpected conditions. In her face she is not much like her father; that is

true; though sometimes I catch a momentary resemblance, which instantly disappears again. Her eyes are not in the least like his, nor has she his manner, or carriage, or any of his little tricks and peculiarities—though, perhaps, I shall observe traces of some of them in time. But especially she resembles him in her voice. The tone—the timbre—reminds me every moment of my poor Claude."

"I suppose," said Arnold, "that one must inherit something, if it is only a voice, from one's father. Have you said anything to her yet about money matters, and a settlement of her claims?"

"No, not yet. I did venture, last night, to approach the subject, but she would not hear of it. So I dropped it. I call that true delicacy, Arnold—native, instinctive, hereditary delicacy."

"Have you given any more money to the American gentleman who brought her home?"

"Iris made him take a hundred pounds, against his will, to buy books with, for he is not rich. Poor fellow! It went much against the grain with him to take the money. But she made him take it. She said he wanted books and instruments, and insisted on his having at least a hundred pounds. It was generous of her. Yes; she is—I am convinced—a truly generous girl, and as open-handed as the day. Now, would a common girl, a girl of no descent, have shown so much delicacy and generosity?"

"By the way, Clara, here is a photograph. Does it belong to you? I—I picked it up."

He showed the photograph which Lala Roy had given him.

"Oh yes; it is a likeness of Dr. Washington, Iris's adopted brother and guardian. She must have dropped it. I should think it was taken a few years back, but it is still a very good likeness. A handsome man, is he not? He grows upon one rather. His parting words with Iris yesterday were very dignified and touching."

"I will give it to her presently," he replied, without further comment.

There was, then, no doubt. The woman was an impostor, and the man was the thief, and the papers were the papers which had been stolen from the safe, and Iris Deseret was no other than his own Iris. But he must not show the least sign of suspicion.

"What are you thinking about, Arnold?" asked Clara. "Your face is as black as thunder. You are not sorry that Iris has returned, are you?"

"I was thinking of my engagement, Clara."

"Why, you are not tired of it already? An engaged man, Arnold, ought not to look so gloomy as that."

"I am not tired of it yet. But I am unhappy as regards some circumstances connected with it. Your disapproval, Clara, for one. My dear cousin, I owe so much to you, that I want to owe you more. Now, I have a proposition—a promise—to make to you. I am now so sure, so very sure and certain, that you will want me to marry Miss Aglen—and no one else—when you once know her, that I will

engage solemnly not to marry her unless you entirely approve. Let me owe my wife to you, as well as everything else."

"Arnold, you are not in earnest?"

"Quite in earnest."

"But I shall never approve. Never—never—never! I could not bring myself, under any circumstances that I can conceive, to approve of such a connection."

"My dear cousin, I am, on the other hand, perfectly certain that you will approve. Why, if I were not quite certain, do you think I should have made this promise? But to return to your newly-found cousin. Tell me more about her."

"Well, I have discovered that she is a really very clever and gifted girl. She can imitate people in the most wonderful way, especially actresses, though she has only been to a theatre once or twice in her life. At Liverpool she heard some one sing what she calls a Topical Song, and this she actually remembers—she carried it away in her head, every word—and she can sing it just as they sing it on the stage, with all the vulgarity and gestures imitated to the very life. Of course I should not like her to do this before anybody else; but it is really very wonderful."

"Indeed!" said Arnold. "It must be very clever and amusing."

"Of course," said Clara, with colossal ignorance, "an American lady can hardly be expected to understand English vulgarities. No doubt there is an American variety."

Arnold thought that a vulgar song could be judged at its true value by any lady, either American or English; but he said nothing.

And then the young lady herself appeared. She had been driving about with Clara among various shops, and now bore upon her person the charming result of these journeys, in the shape of a garment, which was rich in texture, and splendid in the making. And she really was a handsome girl, only with a certain air of being dressed for the stage. But Arnold, now more than suspicious, was not dazzled by the gorgeous raiment, and only considered how his cousin could for a moment imagine this person to be a lady, and how it would be best to break the news.

"Clara's cousin," she said, "I have forgotten your name; but how do you do, again?"

And then they went in to dinner.

"You have learned, I suppose," said Arnold, "something about the Deseret family by this time?"

"Oh yes; I have heard all about the family-tree. I dare say I shall get to know it by heart in time. But you don't expect me, all at once, to care much for it."

"Little Republican!" said Clara. "She actually does not feel a pride in belonging to a good old family."

The girl made a little gesture.

"Your family can't do much for you, that I can see, except to

make you proud, and pretend not to see other women in the shop. That is what the county ladies do."

"Why, my dear, what on earth do you know of the county ladies?"

Lotty blushed a little. She had made a mistake. But she quickly recovered.

"I only know what I've read, cousin, about any kind of English ladies. But that's enough, I'm sure. Stuck-up things!"

And again she observed, from Clara's pained expression, that she had made another mistake.

If she showed a liking for stout at lunch, she manifested a positive passion for champagne at dinner.

"I do like the English custom," she said, "of having two dinners in the day."

"Ladies in America, I suppose," said Clara, "dine in the middle of the day?"

"Always."

"But I have visited many families in New York and Boston who dined late," said Arnold.

"Dare say," she replied carelessly; "I'm going to have some more of that curry stuff, please. And don't ask any more questions, anybody, till I've worried through with it. I'm a wolf at curry."

"She likes England, Arnold," said Clara, covering up this remark, so to speak. "She likes the country, she says, very much."

"At all events," said the girl, "I like this house, which is first-class—fine—proper. And the furniture, and pictures, and all—tip-top. But I'm afraid it is going to be awful dull, except at meals, and when the Boy is going." Her own head was just touched by the "Boy," and she was a little off her guard.

"My dear child," said Clara, "you have only just come, and you have not yet learned to know and love your own home and your father's friends. You must take a little time."

"Oh, I'll take time. As long as you like. But I shall soon be tired of sitting at home. I want to go about and see things—theatres and music-halls, and all kinds of places."

"Ladies in England do not go to music-halls," said Arnold.

"Gentlemen do. Why not ladies, then? Answer me that. Why can't ladies go, when gentlemen go? What is proper for gentlemen is proper for ladies. Very well, then, I want to go somewhere every night. I want to see everything there is to see, and to hear all that there is to hear."

"We shall go, presently, a good deal into society," said Clara timidly. "Society will come back to town very soon now—at least, some of it."

"Oh yes, I dare say. Society! No, thank you, with company manners. I want to laugh, and talk, and enjoy myself."

The champagne, in fact, had made her forget the instructions of her tutor. At all events, she looked anything but "quiet," with her

face flushed and her eyes bright. Suddenly she caught Arnold's expression of suspicion and watchfulness, and resolutely subdued a rising inclination to get up from the table and have a walk round with a snatch of a Topical Song.

"Forgive me, Clara," she murmured in her sweetest tone; "forgive me, cousin. I feel as if I must break out a bit, now and then. Yankee manners, you know. Let me stay quiet with you for a while. You know the thought of starched and stiff London society quite frightens me. I am not used to anything stiff. Let me stay at home quiet, with you."

"Dear girl!" cried Clara, her eyes filling with tears; "she has all Claude's affectionate softness of heart."

"I believe," said Arnold, later on in the evening, "that she must have been a circus-rider, or something of that sort. What on earth does Clara mean by the gentle blood breaking out? We nearly had a breaking out at dinner, but it certainly was not due to the gentle blood."

After dinner, Arnold found her sitting on a sofa with Clara, who was telling her something about the glories of the Deseret family. He was half inclined to pity the girl, or to laugh—he was not certain which—for the patience with which she listened, in order to make amends for any bad impression she might have produced at dinner. He asked her, presently, if she would play. She might be, and certainly was, vulgar; but she could play well, and she knew good music. People generally think that good music softens manners, and does not permit those who play and practise it to be vulgar. But, concerning this young person, so much could not be said with any truth.

"You play very well. Where did you learn? Who was your master?" Arnold asked.

She began to reply, but stopped short. He had very nearly caught her.

"Don't ask questions," she said. "I told you not to ask questions before. Where should I learn but in America? Do you suppose no one can play the piano except in England? Look here," she glanced at her cousin. "Do you, Mr. Arbuthnot, always spend your evenings like this?"

"How like this?"

"Why, going around in a swallow-tail to drawing-rooms with the women, like a tame tom-cat? If you do, you must be a truly good young man. If you don't, what do you do?"

"Very often, I spend my evenings in a drawing-room."

"Oh, Lord! Do most young Englishmen carry on in the same proper way?"

"Why not?"

"Don't they go to music-halls, please, and dancing cribs, and such?"

"Perhaps. But what does it concern us to know what some men do?"

"Oh, not much. Only if I were a man like you, I wouldn't consent to be a tame tom-cat—that is all; but perhaps you like it."

She meant to insult and offend him, so that he should not come any more.

But she did not succeed. He only laughed, feeling that he was getting below the surface, and sat down beside the piano.

"You amuse me," he said, "and you astonish me. You are, in fact, the most astonishing person I ever met. For instance, you come from America, and you talk pure London slang with a cockney twang. How did it get there?"

In fact, it was not exactly London slang, but a patois or dialect, learned partly from her husband, partly from her companions, and partly brought from Gloucester.

"I don't know—I never asked. It came wrapped up in brown paper, perhaps, with a string round it."

"You have lived in America all your life, and you look more like an Englishwoman than any other girl I have ever seen."

"Do I? So much the better for the English girls; they can't do better than take after me. But perhaps—most likely, in fact—you think that American girls all squint, perhaps, or have got hump backs? Anything else?"

"You were brought up in a little American village, and yet you play in the style of a girl who has had the best masters."

She did not explain—it was not necessary to explain—that her master had been her father, who was a teacher of music.

"I can't help it, can I?" she asked; "I can't help it if I turned out different to what you expected. People sometimes do, you know. And when you don't approve of a girl, it's English manners, I suppose, to tell her so—kind of encourages her to persevere, and pray for better luck next time, doesn't it? It's simple, too, and prevents any foolish errors—no mistake afterwards, you see. I say, are you going to come here often? because, if you are, I shall go away back to the States or somewhere, or stay upstairs in my own room. You and me won't get on very well together, I am afraid."

"I don't think you will see me very often," he replied. "That is improbable; yet I dare say I shall come here as often as I usually do."

"What do you mean by that?" She looked sharply and suspiciously at him. He repeated his words, and she perceived that there was meaning in them, and she felt uneasy.

"I don't understand at all," she said; "Clara tells me that this house is mine. Now—don't you know—I don't intend to invite any but my own friends to visit me in my own house."

"That seems reasonable. No one can expect you to invite people who are not your friends."

"Well, then, I ain't likely to call you my friend"—Arnold inclined

his head—"and I am not going to talk riddles any more. Is there anything else you want to say?"

"Nothing more, I think, at present, thank you."

"If there is, you know, don't mind me—have it out—I'm nobody, of course. I'm not expected to have any manners—I'm only a girl. You can say what you please to me, and be as rude as you please; Englishmen always are as rude as they can be to American girls—I've always heard that."

Arnold laughed.

"At all events," he said, "you have charmed Clara, which is the only really important thing. Good-night Miss—Miss Deseret."

"Good-night, old man," she said, laughing, because she bore no malice, and had given him a candid opinion; "I dare say when you get rid of your fine company manners, and put off your swallow-tail, you're not a bad sort, after all. Perhaps, if you would confess, you are as fond of a kick-up on your way home as anybody. Trust you quiet chaps!"

Clara had not fortunately heard much of this conversation, which, indeed, was not meant for her, because the girl was playing all the time some waltz music, which enabled her to talk and play without being heard at the other end of the room.

Well, there was now no doubt. The American Physician and the subject of the photograph were certainly the same man. And this man was also the thief of the safe, and Iris Aglen was Iris Deseret. Of that, Arnold had no longer any reasonable doubt. There was, however, one thing more. Before leaving Clara's house, he refreshed his memory as to the Deseret arms. The quarterings of the shield were, so far, exactly what Mr. Emblem recollected.

"It is," said Lala Roy, "what I thought. But, as yet, not a word to Iris."

He then proceeded to relate the repentance, the confession, and the atonement proposed by the remorseful James. But he did not tell quite all; for the wise man never tells all. What really happened was this. When James had made a clean breast and confessed his enormous share in the villainy, Lala Roy bound him over to secrecy under pain of Law—Law the Rigorous—pointing out that although they do not in England exhibit the Kourbash, or bastinado the soles of the feet, they make the prisoner sleep on a hard board, starve him on skilly, set him to work which tears his nails from his fingers, keep him from conversation, tobacco, and drink, and when he comes out, so hedge him around with prejudice and so clothe him with a robe of shame, that no one will ever employ him again, and he is therefore doomed to go back again to the English Hell. Lala Roy, though a man of few words, drew so vivid a description of the punishment which awaited his penitent, that James, foxy as he was by nature, felt constrained to resolve that henceforth, happen what might, then and for all future time, he

would range himself on the side of virtue, and as a beginning, he promised to do everything that he could for the confounding of Joseph and the bringing of the guilty to justice.

XIII.

HIS LAST CHANCE.

THREE days elapsed, during which nothing was done. That cause is strongest which can afford to wait. But in those three days several things happened.

First of all, Mr. David Chalker, seeing that the old man was obdurate, made up his mind to lose most of his money, and cursed Joe continually for having led him to build upon his grandfather's supposed wealth. Yet he ought to have known. Wealthy men do not lock up their savings in investments for their grandchildren, nor do they borrow small sums at ruinous interest of money-lending solicitors, nor do they give Bills of Sale. These general rules were probably known to Mr. Chalker; yet he did not apply them to this particular case. The neglect of the General Rule, in fact, may lead the most astute of mankind into ways of foolishness.

James, for his part, stimulated perpetually by fear of prison and loss of character and of situation—for who would employ an Assistant who got keys made to open the safe?—showed himself the most repentant of mortals. Dr. Joseph Washington, lulled into the most perfect security, enjoyed all those pleasures which the sum of three hundred pounds could purchase. Nobody knew where he was, or what he was doing. As for Lotty, she had established herself firmly in Chester Square, and Cousin Clara daily found out new and additional proofs of the gentle blood breaking out!

On the fourth morning Lala Roy sallied forth. He was about to make a great Moral Experiment, the nature of which you will immediately understand. None but a philosopher who had studied Confucius and Lao Kiun would have conceived so fine a scheme.

First, he paid a visit to Mr. Chalker.

The office was the ground-floor front room in one of the small streets north of the King's Road. It was not an imposing office, nor did it seem as if much business was done there; and one clerk of tender years sufficed for Mr. Chalker's wants.

"Oh!" he said; "it's our friend from India. You're a lodger of old Emblem's, ain't you?"

"I have lived with him for twenty years. I am his friend."

"Very well. I dare say we shall come to terms, if he's come

to his senses. Just take a chair and sit down. How is the old man?"

"He has not yet recovered the use of his intellect."

"Oh! Then how can you act for him if he's off his head?"

"I came to ask an English creditor to show mercy."

"Mercy? What is the man talking about? Mercy! I want my money. What has that got to do with mercy?"

"Nothing, truly: but I will give you your money. I will give you justice, and you shall give me mercy. You lent Mr. Emblem fifty pounds. Will you take your fifty pounds, and leave us in peace?"

He drew a bag out of his pocket—a brown banker's bag—and Mr. Chalker distinctly heard the rustling of notes.

This is a sound which to some ears is more delightful than the finest music in the world. It awakens all the most pleasurable emotions; it provokes desire and hankering after possession; and it fills the soul with the imaginary enjoyment of wealth.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Chalker, confident that better terms than those would be offered. "If that is all you have to say, you may go away again."

"But the rest is usury. Think! To give fifty, and ask three hundred and fifty, is the part of a usurer."

"Call it what you please. The bill of sale is for three hundred and fifty pounds. Pay that three hundred and fifty, with costs and Sheriff's poundage, and I take away my man. If you don't pay it, then the books on the shelves and the furniture of the house go to the hammer."

"The books, I am informed," said Lala Roy, "will not bring as much as a hundred pounds if they are sold at auction. As for the furniture, some of it is mine, and some belongs to Mr. Emblem's granddaughter."

"His granddaughter! Oh, it's a swindle!" said Mr. Chalker angrily: "it is nothing more or less than a rank swindle! The old man ought to be prosecuted; and, mind you, I'll prosecute him, and you too, for conspiring with him."

"A prosecution," said the Hindoo, "will not hurt him, but it might hurt you. For it would show how you lent him fifty pounds five years ago; how you made him give you a bill for a hundred; how you did not press him to pay that bill, but you continually offered to renew it for him, increasing the amount on each time of renewal; and at last you made him give you a bill of sale for three hundred and fifty. This is, I suppose, one of the many ways in which Englishmen grow rich. There are also usurers in India, but they do not, in my country, call themselves lawyers. A prosecution? My friend, it is for us to prosecute. Shall we show that you have done the same thing with many others? You are, by this time, well known in the neighbourhood, Mr. Chalker, and you are so much beloved, that there are many who would be delighted to

relate their experiences and dealings with so clever a man. Have you ever studied, one asks with wonder, the precepts of the great Sage who founded your religion?"

"Oh, come, don't let us have any religious nonsense!"

"I assure you they are worth studying. I am myself a humble follower of Gautama, but I have read those Precepts with profit. In the kingdom imagined by that Preacher, there is no room for usurers, Mr. Chalker. Where, then, will be your kingdom? Every man must be somewhere. You must have a kingdom and a king."

"This is tomfoolery!" Mr. Chalker turned red, and looked very uncomfortable. "Stick to business. Payment in full. Those are my terms."

"You think, then, that the Precepts of your Sage are only intended for men while they sit in the church? Many Englishmen think so, I have observed."

"Payment in full, mister. That's what I want."

He banged his fist on the table.

"No abatement? No mercy shown to an old man on the edge of the grave? Think, Mr. Chalker. You will soon be as old as Mr. Emblem, your hair as white, your reason as unsteady——"

"Payment in full, and no more words."

"It is well. Then, Mr. Chalker, I have another proposal to make to you."

"I thought we should come to something more. Out with it!"

"I believe you are a friend of Mr. Emblem's grandson?"

"Joe? Oh yes, I know Joe."

"You know him intimately?"

"Yes, I may say so."

"You know that he forged his grandfather's name; that he is a profligate and a spendthrift, and that he has taken or borrowed from his grandfather whatever money he could get, and that—in short, he is a friend of your own?"

It was not until after his client had gone that Mr. Chalker understood, and began to resent this last observation.

"Go on," he said, "I know all about Joe."

"Good. Then if you can tell me anything about him which may be of use to me I will do this: I will pay you double the valuation of Mr. Emblem's shop, in return for a receipt in full. If you cannot, you may proceed to sell everything by auction."

Mr. Chalker hesitated. A valuation would certainly give a higher figure than a forced sale, and then that valuation doubled!

"Well," he said, "I don't know. It's a cruel hard case to be done out of my money. How am I to find out whether anything I tell you would be of use to you or not? What kind of thing do you want? How do I know that if you get what you want, you won't swear it is of no use to you?"

"You have the word of one who never broke his word."

Mr. Chalker laughed derisively.

"Why," he said, "I wouldn't take the word of an English Bishop—no, nor of an Archbishop—where money is concerned. What is it—what is the kind of thing you want to know?"

"It is concerned with a certain woman."

"Oh, well, if it is only a woman. I thought it might be something about money. Joe, you see, like a good many other people, has got his own ideas about money, and perhaps he isn't so strict in his dealings as he might be—few men are—and I should not like to let out one or two things that only him and me know." In fact, Mr. Chalker saw, in imagination, the burly form of Joe in his office, brandishing a stick, and accusing him of friendship's trust betrayed. "But as it is only a woman—which of 'em is it?"

"This is a young woman, said to be handsome, tall, and finely-made; she has, I am told, light brown hair and large eyes. That is the description of her given to me."

"I know the girl you mean. Splendid figure, and goes well in tights?"

"I have not been informed on that subject. Can you tell me any more about her?"

"I suspect, mister," said Joe's friend, with cunning eyes, "that you've made the acquaintance of a certain widow that was—married woman that is. I remember now, I've seen Hindoos about her lodgings, down Shadwell way."

"Perhaps," said Lala, "and perhaps not." His face showed not the least sign which could be read. "You can tell me afterwards what you know of the woman at Shadwell."

"Well, then, Joe thinks I know nothing about it. Else I wouldn't tell you. Because I don't want a fight with Joe. Is this any use to you? He is married to the girl as well as to the widow."

"He is married to the girl as well as to the widow. He has, then, two wives. It is against the English custom, and breaks the English law. The young wife who is beautiful, and the old wife who has the lodging-house. Very good. What is the address of this woman?"

Mr. Chalker looked puzzled.

"Don't you know it, then? What are you driving at?"

"What is the name and address of this Shadwell woman?"

"Well, then"—he wrote an address and handed it over—"you may be as close as you like. I don't care. It isn't my business. But you won't make me believe you don't know all about her. Look here, whatever happens, don't say I told you."

"It shall be a secret," said Lala, taking out the bag of notes. "Let us complete the business at once, Mr. Chalker. Here is another offer. I will give you two hundred pounds in discharge of your whole claim, or you shall have a valuation made, if you prefer it, and I will double the amount."

Mr. Chalker chose the former promptly, and in a few moments

handed over the necessary receipts, and sent his clerk to recall the Man in Possession.

"What are you going to do with Joe?" he asked. "No good turn, I'll swear. And a more unforgiving face than yours I never set eyes on. It isn't my business, but I'll give you one warning. If you make Joe desperate, he'll turn on you; and Lord help your slender ribs if Joe once begins. Don't make him desperate. And now I'll tell you another thing. First, the woman at Shadwell is horribly jealous. She'll make a row. Next, the young one, who sings at a Music Hall, she's desperately in love with her husband—more than he is with her—and if a woman's in love with a man, there's one thing she never forgives. You understand what that is. Between the pair, Joe's likely to have a rough time."

"I do. I have had many wives myself."

"Oh, Lord, he says he's had many wives! How many?"

Lala Roy read the receipt, and put it in his pocket. Then he rose and remarked, with a smile of supreme superiority:

"It is a pleasure to give money to you, and to such as you, Mr. Chalker."

"Is it?" he replied with a grin. "Give me some more, then."

"You are one of those who, the richer they become, the less harm they do. Many Englishmen are of this disposition. When they are poor they are jackals, hyænas, wolves, and man-eating tigers; when they are rich they are benevolent and charitable, and show mercy unto the wretched and the poor. So that, in their case, the words of the Wise Man are naught, when he says that the earth is barren of good things where she hoardeth treasure; and that where gold is in her bowels no herb groweth. Pray, Mr. Chalker, pray earnestly for gold, in order that you may become virtuous."

Mr. Chalker grinned, but looked uncomfortable.

"I will, mister," he said, "I will pray with all my might."

Nevertheless, he remained for the space of the whole morning in uneasiness. The words of the Philosopher troubled him. I do not go so far as to say that his mind went back to the days when he was young and innocent, because he was still young, and he never had been innocent; nor do I say that a tear rose to his eyes and trickled down his cheek, because nothing brought tears into his eyes except a speck of dust; or that he resolved to confine himself for the future to legitimate lawyer's work, because he would then have starved. I only say that he felt uncomfortable and humiliated, and chiefly so because an old man with white hair and a brown skin—hang it! a common nigger—had been able to bring discord into the sweet harmony of his thoughts.

Lala Roy then betook himself to Joe's former lodgings, and asked for that gentleman's present address.

The landlady professed to know nothing.

"You do know, however," he persisted, reading knowledge in her eyes.

"Is it trouble you mean for him?" asked the woman, "and him such a fine, well-set-up young man, too! Is it trouble? Oh, dear, I always thought he got his money on the cross. Look here. I ain't going to round on him, though he has gone away and left a comfortable room. So there! And you may go."

Lala Roy opened his hand. There were at least five golden sovereigns glorifying his dingy palm.

"Can gold," the Moralist asked, "ever increase the virtue of man? Woman, how much?"

"Is it trouble?" she repeated, looking greedily at the money. "Will the young man get copped?"

Lala understood no London slang. But he showed his hand again.

"How much? Whoso is covetous let him know that his heart is poor. How much?"

"Poor young man! I'll take them all, please, sir. What's he done?"

"Where does he live?"

"I know where he lives," she said, "because our Bill rode away with him at the back of his cab, and saw where he got out. He's married now, and his wife sings at the Music Hall, and he lives on her earnings. Quite the gentleman he is now, and smokes cigars all day long. There's his address, and thank you for the money. Oh!" she said with a gasp. "To think that people can earn five pounds so easy!"

"May the gold procure you happiness—such happiness as you desire!" said Lala Roy.

"It will nearly pay the quarter's rent. And that's about happiness enough for one morning."

Joe was sitting in his room alone, half asleep. In fact, he had a head upon him. He sprang to his feet, however, when he saw Lala Roy.

"Hallo!" he cried. "You here, Nig? How the devil did you find out my address?"

There was not only astonishment, but some alarm upon his countenance.

"Never mind. I want a little conversation with you, Mr. Joseph."

"Well, sit down and let us have it out. I say, have you come to tell me that you did sneak those papers, after all? What did you get for them?"

"I have not come to tell you that. I dare say, however, we shall be able, some day, to tell you who did steal the papers—if any were stolen, that is."

"Quite so, my jolly mariner. If any were stolen. Ho, ho! you've got to prove that first, haven't you? How's the old man?"

"He is ill; he is feeble with age; he is weighed down with misfortune. I am come, Mr. Joseph, to ask your help for him."

"My help for him? Why, can't he help himself?"

"Four or five years ago he incurred a debt for one who forged his name. He needed not to have paid that money, but he saved a man from prison."

"Who was that? Who forged his name?"

"I do not name that man, whose end will be confusion, unless he repent and make amends. This debt has grown until it is too large for him to pay it. Unless it is paid his whole property, his very means of living, will be sold by the creditor."

"How can I pay him back? It is three hundred and fifty pounds now," said Joseph.

"Man, thou hast named thyself."

Joseph stammered, but blustered still.

"Well — then — what the devil do you mean — you and your forgery?"

"Forgery is one crime; you have since committed, perhaps, others. Think. You have been saved once from prison. Will anyone save you a second time? How have you shown your gratitude? Will you now do something for your benefactor?"

"What do you mean, I say? What do you mean with your forgery and prison? Hang me, if I oughtn't to kick you out of the room! I would, too, if you were ten years younger. Do you know, sir, that you are addressing an officer and a gentleman?"

"There is sometimes, even at the very end, a door opened for repentance. The door is open now. Young man, once more, consider. Your grandfather is old and destitute. Will you help him?"

Joseph hesitated.

"I don't believe he is poor. He has saved up all his money for the girl; let her help him."

"You are wrong. He has saved nothing. His granddaughter maintains herself by teaching. He has not a penny. You have got from him, and you have spent, all the money he had."

"He ought to have saved."

"He could, at least, have lived by his calling but for you and for this debt which was incurred for you. He is ruined by it. What will you do for him?"

"I am not going to do anything for him," said Joseph. "Is it likely? Did he ever have anything but a scowl for me?"

"He who injures another is always in the wrong. You will, then, do nothing? Think. It is the open door. He is your grandfather; he has kept you from starvation when you were turned out of office for drink and dishonesty. I hear that you now have money. I have been told that you have been seen to show a large sum of money. Will you give him some?"

As a matter of fact, Joe had been, the night before, having a festive evening at the Music Hall, from which his wife was absent, owing to temporary indisposition. While there, he took so much Scotch whisky and water that his tongue was loosened and he became boastful; and that to so foolish an extent that he actually

brandished in the eyes of the multitude a whole handful of bank-notes. He remembered this, and was greatly struck by the curious fact that Lala Roy should seem to know it.

"I haven't got any money. It was all brag last night. I couldn't help my grandfather if I wanted to."

"You have what is left of three hundred pounds," said Lala Roy.

"If I said that last night," replied Joe, "I must have been drunker than I thought. You old fool! the flimsies were duffers. Where do you think I could raise three hundred pounds? No, no —I'm sorry for the old man, but I can't help him. I'm going to sea again in a day or two. We jolly sailors don't make much money, but if a pound or two, when I come home, will be of any use to him, he's only got to say the word. After all, I believe it's a kid, got up between you. The old man must have saved something."

"You will suffer him, then, even to be taken to the workhouse?"

"Why, I can't help it, and I suppose you'll have to go there too. Ho, ho! I say, Nig!" He began to laugh. "Ho, ho! They won't let you wear that old fez of yours at the workhouse. How beautiful you'll look in the workhouse uniform, won't you? I'll come home, and bring you some baccy. Now you can cheese it, old 'un."

"I will go, if that is what you mean. It is the last time that you will be asked to help your grandfather. The door is closed. You have had one more chance, and you have thrown it away."

So he departed, and Joe, who was of a self-reliant and sanguine disposition, thought nothing of the warning, which was therefore thrown away and wasted.

As for Lala, he called a cab, and drove to Shadwell. And if any man ever felt that he was an instrument set apart to carry out a Scheme of Vengeance, that Hindoo Philosopher felt like one. The Count of Monte Cristo himself was not more filled with the Faith and Conviction of his Divine obligation.

In the afternoon he returned to Chelsea, and perhaps one who knew him might have remarked upon his face something like a gleam of satisfaction. He had done his duty.

It was now five days since the fatal discovery. Mr. Emblem still remained upstairs in his chair: but he was slowly recovering. He clearly remembered that he had been robbed, and the principal sign of the shock was his firm conviction that by his own exercise of memory Iris had been enabled to enter into possession of her own.

As regards the Bill of Sale, he had clean forgotten it. Now, in the morning, there happened a thing which surprised James very much. The Man in Possession was recalled. He went away. So that the money must have been paid. James was so astonished that he ran upstairs to tell Iris.

"Then," said the girl, "we shall not be turned out after all. But who has paid the money?"

It could have been no other than Arnold. Yet when, later in the day, he was taxed with having committed the good action, Arnold stoutly denied it. He had not so much money in the world, he said; in fact, he had no money at all.

"The good man," said the Philosopher, "has friends of whom he knoweth not. As the river returns its waters to the sea, so the heart rejoiceth in returning benefits received."

"Oh, Lala," said Iris. "But on whom have we conferred any benefits?"

"The moon shines upon all alike," said Lala, "and knows not what she illumines."

"Lala Roy," said Arnold, suddenly getting a gleam of intelligence, "it is you who have paid this money."

"You, Lala?"

"No one else could have paid it," said Arnold.

"But I thought—I thought——" said Iris.

"You thought I had no money at all. Children, I have some. One may live without money in Hindostan, but in England even the Philosopher cannot meditate unless he can pay for food and shelter. I have money, Iris, and I have paid the usurer enough to satisfy him. Let us say no more."

"Oh, Lala!" The tears came to Iris's eyes. "And now we shall go on living as before."

"I think not," he replied. "In the generations of Man, the seasons continue side by side; but spring does not always continue with winter."

"I know now," interrupted Mr. Emblem, suddenly waking into life and recollection; "I could not remember at first. Now I know very well, but I cannot tell how, that the man who stole my papers is my own grandson. James would not steal. James is curious; he wants to read over my shoulder what I am writing. He would pry and find out. But he would not steal. It doesn't matter much—does it?—since I was able to repair the loss—I always had a most excellent memory—and Iris has now received her inheritance; but it is my grandson Joe who has stolen the papers. My daughter's son came home from Australia when—but this I learned afterwards—he had already disgraced himself there. He ran into debt, and I paid his debts; he forged my name, and I accepted the Bill; he took all the money I could let him have, and still he asked for more. There is no one in the world who would rob me of those papers except Joseph."

Now, the door was open to the staircase, and the door of communication between the shop and the house-passage was also open. This seems a detail hardly worth noting; yet it proved of the greatest importance. From such small trifles follow great events. Observe that as yet no positive proof was in the hands of the two conspirators which would actually connect Iris with Claude Deseret. The proofs were in the stolen papers, and

though Clara had those papers, who was to show that these papers were actually those in the sealed packet?

When Mr. Emblem finished speaking, no one replied, because Arnold and Lala knew the facts already, but did not wish to spread them abroad; and next, because to Iris it was nothing new that her cousin was a bad man, and because she thought now that the Man in Possession was gone, they might just as well forget the papers, and go on as if all this fuss had not happened.

In the silence that followed this speech, they heard the voice of James downstairs, saying:

"I am sorry to say, sir, that Mr. Emblem is ill upstairs, and you can't see him to-day."

"Ill, is he? I am very sorry. Take him my compliments, James. Mr. Frank Farrar's compliments, and tell him——"

And then Mr. Emblem sprang to his feet, crying:

"Stop him! stop him! Go downstairs some one, and stop him! I don't know where he lives. Stop him! stop him!"

Arnold rushed down the stairs. He found in the shop an elderly gentleman, carrying a bundle of books. It was, in fact, Mr. Farrar, come to negotiate the sale of another work from his library.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Arnold. "Mr. Emblem is most anxious to see you. Would you step upstairs?"

"Quick, Mr. Farrar—quick," the old man held him tight by the hand. "Tell me before my memory runs away with me again—tell me. Listen, Iris! Yet it doesn't matter, because you have already—— Tell me—— He seemed about to wander again, but he pulled himself together with a great effort. "You knew my son-in-law before his marriage."

"Surely, Mr. Emblem; I knew your son-in-law, and his father, and all his people."

"And his name was not Aglen at all?" asked Arnold.

"No: he took the name of Aglen from a fancied feeling of pride when he quarrelled with his father about—well, it was about his marriage, as you know, Mr. Emblem; he came to London, and tried to make his way by writing, and thought to do it, and either to hide a failure or brighten a success, by using a pseudonym. People were more jealous about their names in those days. He had better," added the unsuccessful veteran of letters, "he had far better have made his living as a—as a—" he looked about him for a fitting simile—"as a bookseller."

"Then, sir," said Arnold, "what was his real name?"

"His name was Claude Deseret, of course."

"Iris," said Arnold, taking her hand, "this is the last proof. We have known it for four or five days, but we wanted the final proof, and now we have it. My dear, you are the cousin of Clara Holland, and all her fortune, by her grandfather's will, is yours. This is the secret of the safe. This was what the stolen papers told you."

XIV.

THE HAND OF FATE.

At the first stroke of noon next day, Arnold arrived at his cousin's house in Chester Square. He was accompanied by Iris, by Lala Roy, and by Mr. Frank Farrar.

"Pray, Arnold, what is meant by all this mystery?" asked Clara, receiving him and his party with considerable surprise.

"I will explain all in a few minutes, my dear Clara. Meanwhile, have you done what you promised?"

"Yes. I wrote to Dr. Washington. He will be here, I expect, in a few minutes."

"You wrote exactly in the form of words you promised me?"

"Yes, exactly. I asked him to meet me here this morning at a quarter past twelve, in order to discuss a few points connected with Iris's future arrangements, before he left for America, and I wrote on the envelope, 'Immediate and important.'"

"Very well. He will be sure to come, I think. Perhaps your cousin will insist upon another cheque for fifty pounds being given to him."

"Arnold, you are extremely suspicious and most ungenerous about Dr. Washington, on whose truth and disinterested honesty I thoroughly rely."

"We shall see. Meanwhile, Clara, I desire to present to you a young lady of whom we have already spoken. This is Miss Aglen, who is, I need hardly say, deeply anxious to win your good opinion. And this is Lala Roy, an Indian gentleman who knew her father, and has lived in the same house with her for twenty years. Our debt—I shall soon be able to say your debt—of gratitude to this gentleman for his long kindness to Miss Aglen—is one which can never be repaid."

Clara gave the most frigid bow to both Iris and Lala Roy.

"Really, Arnold, you are talking in enigmas this morning. What am I to understand? What has this gentleman to do with my appointment with Dr. Washington?"

"My dear cousin, I am so happy this morning that I wonder I do not talk in conundrums, or rondeaux, or terza rima. It is a mere chance, I assure you. Perhaps I may break out in rhymes presently. This evening we will have fireworks in the square, roast a whole ox, invite the neighbours, and dance about a maypole. You shall lead off the dance, Clara."

"Pray go on, Arnold. All this is very inexplicable."

"This gentleman, however, is a very old friend of yours, Clara. Do you not recognise Mr. Frank Farrar, who used to stay at the Hall in the old days?"

"I remember Mr. Farrar very well." Clara gave him her hand. "But I should not have known him. Why have we never met in society during all these years, Mr. Farrar?"

"I suppose because I have been out of society, Miss Holland," said the scholar. "When a man marries, and has a large family, and a small income, and grows old, and has to see the young fellows shoving him out at every point, he doesn't care much about society. I hope you are well and happy."

"I am very well, and I ought to be happy, because I have recovered Claude's lost heiress, my cousin, Iris Deseret, and she is the best and most delightful of girls, with the warmest heart and the sweetest instincts of a lady by descent and birth."

She looked severely at Arnold, who said nothing, but smiled incredulously.

Mr. Farrar looked from Iris to Miss Holland, bewildered.

"And why do you come to see me to-day, Mr. Farrar—and with Arnold?"

"Because I have undertaken to answer one question presently, which Mr. Arbuthnot is to ask me. That is why I am here. Not but what it gives me the greatest pleasure to see you again, Miss Holland, after so many years."

"Our poor Claude died in America, you know, Mr. Farrar."

"So I have recently heard."

"And left one daughter."

"That also I have learned." He looked at Iris.

"She is with me, here in this house, and has been with me for a week. You may understand, Mr. Farrar, the happiness I feel in having with me Claude's only daughter."

Mr. Farrar looked from her to Arnold with increasing amazement. But he said nothing.

"I have appointed this morning, at Arnold's request," Clara went on, "to have an interview, perhaps the last, with the gentleman who brought my dear Iris from America. I say, at Arnold's request, because he asked me to do this, and I have always trusted him implicitly, and I hope he is not going to bring trouble upon us now, although I do not, I confess, understand the presence of his friends or their connection with my cousin."

"My dear Clara," said Arnold again, "I ask for nothing but patience. And that only for a few moments. As for the papers, you have them all in your possession?"

"Yes; they are locked up in my strong-box."

"Do not, on any account, give them to anybody. However, after this morning, you will not be asked. Have you taken as yet any steps at all for the transference of your property to—to the rightful heir?"

"Not yet."

"Thank goodness! And now, Clara, I will ask you, as soon as Dr. Washington and—your cousin—are in the drawing-room, to

ring the bell. You need not explain why. We will answer the summons, and we will give all the explanations that may be required."

"I will not have my cousin vexed, Arnold."

"You shall not. Your cousin shall never be vexed by me as long as I live."

"And Dr. Washington must not be in any way offended. Consider the feelings of an American gentleman, Arnold. He is my guest."

"You may thoroughly rely upon my consideration for the feelings of an American gentleman. Go; there is a knock at the door. Go to receive him, and, when both are in the room, ring the bell."

Joe was in excellent spirits that morning. His interview with Lala Roy convinced him that nothing whatever was known of the papers, therefore nothing could be suspected. What a fool, he thought, must be his grandfather, to have had these papers in his hands for eighteen years, and never to have opened the packet, in obedience to the injunction of a dead man. Had it been his own case, he would have opened the papers without the least delay, mastered the contents, and instantly claimed the property. He would have gone on to use it for his own purposes and private gain, and with an uninterrupted run of eighteen years, he would most certainly have made a very pretty thing out of it.

However, everything works well for him who greatly dares. His wife would manage for him better than he could do it for himself. Yet a few weeks, and the great fortune would fall into his hands. He walked all the way to Chester Square, considering how he should spend the money. There are some forms of foolishness, such as, say, those connected with art, literature, charity, and work for others, which attract some rich men, but which he was not at all tempted to commit. There were others, however, connected with horses, races, betting, and gambling, which tempted him strongly. In fact, Joseph contemplated spending this money wholly on his own pleasures. Probably it would be a part of his pleasure to toss a few crumbs to his wife.

It is sad to record that Lotty, finding herself received with so much enthusiasm, had already begun to fall off in her behaviour. Even Clara, who thought she discovered every hour some new point of resemblance in the girl to her father, was fain to admit that the "Americanisms" were much too pronounced for general society.

Her laugh was louder and more frequent; her jests were rough and common; she used slang words freely; her gestures were extravagant, and she walked in the streets as if she wished everyone to notice her. It is the walk of the Music Hall stage, and the trick of it consists chiefly in giving, so to speak, prominence to the shoulders and oscillation to the skirts. In fact, she was one of

those ladies who ardently desire that all the world should notice them.

Further, in her conversation she showed an acquaintance with certain phases of the English lower life which was astonishing in an American girl. But Clara had no suspicion—none whatever.

One thing the girl did which pleased her mightily.

She was never tired of hearing about her father, and his way of looking, standing, walking, folding his hands, and holding himself. And constantly more and more Clara detected these little tricks in his daughter. Perhaps she learned them.

"My dear," she said, "to think that I ever thought you unlike your dear father!"

So that it made her extremely uncomfortable to detect a certain reserve in Arnold towards the girl, and then a dislike of Arnold in the girl herself. However, she was accustomed to act by Arnold's advice, and consented, when he asked her, to arrange so that Arnold might meet Dr. Washington. As if anything that so much as looked like suspicion could be thought of for a moment!

But the bell rang, and Arnold, followed by his party, led the way from the morning-room to the drawing-room. Dr. Joseph Washington was standing with his back to the door. The girl was dressed as if she had just come from a walk, and was holding Clara's hand.

"Yes, madam," he was saying softly, "I return to-morrow to America, and my wife and my children. I leave our dear girl in the greatest confidence in your hands. I only venture to advise that, to avoid lawyers' expenses, you should simply instruct somebody—the right person—to transfer the property from your name to the name of Iris. Then you will be saved troubles and formalities of every kind. As for me, my home is in America——"

"No, Joseph," said Lala Roy gently; "it is in Shadwell."

"It is a lie!" he cried, starting; "it is an infernal lie!"

"Iris," said Arnold, "lift your veil, my dear. Mr. Farrar, who is this young lady? Look upon this face, Clara."

"This is the daughter of Claude Deseret," said Mr. Farrar, "if she is the daughter of the man who married Alice Emblem, and went by the name of Aglen."

Clara turned a terrified face to Arnold.

"Arnold, help me!"

"Whose face is this?" he repeated.

"It is—good heavens!—it is the face of your portrait. It is Claude's face again. They are his very eyes——" She covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Arnold, what is it? Who is this other?"

"This other lady, Clara, is a Music Hall Singer, who calls herself Carlotta Claradine, wife of this man, who is not an American at all, but the grandson of Mr. Emblem, the bookseller, and therefore cousin of Iris. It is he who robbed his grandfather of the papers

which you have in your possession, Clara. And this is an audacious conspiracy, which we have been so fortunate as to unearth and detect, step by step."

"Oh, can such wickedness be?" said Clara; "and in my house, too?"

"Joe," said Lotty, "the game is up. I knew it wouldn't last."

"Let them prove it," said Joe; "let them prove it. I defy you to prove it!"

"Don't be a fool, Joe," said his wife. "Remember," she whispered, "you've got a pocketful of money. Let us go peaceably."

"As for you, Nigger," said Joe, "I'll break every bone in your body."

"Not here," said Arnold; "there will be no breaking of bones in this house."

Lotty began to laugh.

"The gentle blood always shows itself, doesn't it?" she said. "I've got the real instincts of a lady, haven't I? Oh, it was beautiful while it lasted. And every day more and more like my father."

"Arnold," cried poor Clara, crushed, "help me!"

"Come," said Arnold, "you had better go at once."

"I won't laugh at you," said Lotty. "It's a shame, and you're a good old thing. But it did me good, it really did, to hear all about the gentle blood. Come, Joe. Let us go away quietly."

She took her husband's arm. Joe was standing sullen and desperate. Mr. Chalker was right. It wanted very little to prevent him from falling upon the whole party, and going off with a fight.

"Young woman," said Lala Roy, "you had better not go outside the house with the man. It will be well for you to wait until he has gone."

"Why? He is my husband, whatever we have done, and I'm not ashamed of him."

"Is he your husband? Ask him what I meant when I said his home was at Shadwell."

"Come, Lotty," said Joe, with a curious change of manner. "Let us go at once."

"Wait," Lala repeated. "Wait, young woman; let him go first. Pray—pray let him go first."

"Why should I wait? I go with my husband."

"I thought to save you from shame. But if you will go with him, ask him again why his home is at Shadwell, and why he left his wife."

Lotty sprang upon her husband, and caught his wrists with both hands.

"Joe, what does he mean? Tell me he is a liar."

"That would be useless," said Lala Roy. "Because a very few minutes will prove the contrary. Better, however, that he should go to prison for marrying two wives than for robbing his grandfather's safe."

"It's a lie!" Joe repeated, looking as dangerous as a wild boar brought to bay.

"There was a Joseph Gallop, formerly assistant purser in the service of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company," continued the man of Fate, "who married, nine months ago, a certain widow at Shadwell. He was turned out of the service, and he married her because she had a prosperous lodging-house."

"Oh—h!" cried Lotty. "You villain! You thought to live upon my earnings, did you? You put me up to pretend to be somebody else. Miss Holland"—she fell upon her knees, literally and simply, and without any theatrical pretence at all—"forgive me! I am properly punished. Oh, he is made of lies! He told me that the real Iris was dead and buried, and he was the rightful heir; and as for you"—she sprang to her feet and turned upon her husband—"I know it is true. I know it is true—I can see it within your guilty eyes."

"If you have any doubt," said Lala, "here is a copy of the marriage-certificate."

She took it, read it, and put it in her pocket. Then she went out of the room without another word, but with rage and revenge in her eyes.

Joseph followed her, saying no more. He had lost more than he thought to lose. But there was still time to escape, and he had most of the money in his pocket.

But another surprise awaited him.

The lady from Shadwell, in fact, was waiting for him outside the door. With her were a few Shadwell friends, of the seafaring profession, come to see fair play. It was a disgraceful episode in the history of Chester Square. After five minutes or so, during which no welsher on a race-course was ever more hardly used, two policemen interfered to rescue the man of two wives, and there was a procession all the way to the police-court, where, after several charges of assault had been preferred and proved against half-a-dozen mariners, Joseph was himself charged with bigamy, both wives giving evidence, and committed for trial.

His old friend, Mr. David Chalker, one is sorry to add, refused to give bail, so that he remained in custody, and will now endure hardness for a somewhat lengthened period.

"Clara," said Arnold, "Iris will stay with you, if you ask her. We shall not marry, my dear, without your permission. I have promised that already, have I not?"

THE END.

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